



## "The Theory of Advaitvad as Reflected in the Poetry of Akho - A Medieval Gujarati Poet"

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### **Introduction:**

Philosophy is a quest after the inner meaning of things; the search for the real; an investigation of the relation between the seen and the unseen. Poetry also has its eye on Truth as seen by the poet's inspired mind. Philosophy and poetry both have their beginning in Wonder. The philosopher and the poet both are seers, but the methods of each are distinct. The philosopher's method is analytical, the poet's synthetical, he sees and grasps the Truth by the help of direct intuition.

### **The Theory of Advaitvad (Non-dualism) given by Shakaracharya:**

The Vedanta of Shakara centers round the absolute reality of *Brahman*, the identity of *Brahman* and the Self and the relative reality of the world of nature. This teaching of Shakaracharya may be expressed in Sanskrit as under:

*Brahma satyam jagat mithya*

*Jivo brhamaiv naparah.*

The fundamental ideal of the Vedanta is: *tatvam asi*, (I AM BRAHMAN) *aham brahmasmi*. i.e. the complete identity of the *Brahman* and the *Atman*. *AYAM AATMA BRAHM.*

The *Atman* in each of us is not a mere a part or an emanation or a mode of *Brahman*, but it is fully and entirely the *Brahman* itself. According to Shakara the experience of multiplicity and



the duality between *Brahman* and *Atman* is due to an innate illusion which is called *Avidya* or ignorance. He says that the Ultimate *Brahman* is in the Self. This *Brahma* is the innerself *Antaratma* in each of us but it is difficult to know it because it is always the knowing subject and never its objects. It can however be known by those who like the limbs of the tortoise withdraw their senses from their respective objects and concentrates on their innermost nature which is one with *Brahman*. To know this is called *Moksha*. The conception of the Self (*Atman*) is in the Vedanta the all important conception. Because the Self is the same as *Brahman* and *Brahman* is not merely an important but it is the only important principle of Shakara's Vedanta. Just as all vessels of clay are ultimately all clay, so the whole universe is ultimately only *Brahman*.

### **The Poetry by Akho - A Medieval Gujarati Poet:**

The period of 17th Century is very important in Gujarati Literature. This period is filled up with the poems of three well-known poets: Akho, Premanand and Samal. Akho Bhagat is a past master in the art of exposing all kinds of shams, both in religious as well as worldly life. His works reflect the moral, intellectual and literary decline which was overtaking India.

Distressed by the futility of worldly relations and possessions, he started studying the philosophy of Shankaracharya which gave him the solace he needed. Late in his life he spent either in expounding the doctrines of Shankara or lashing the world's hypocrisy in caustic verse. Akho started writing at the age of 50 or so and wrote for some 15 years. The *Advaita* Philosophy gets reflected in his works. They are: *Akhegita*, *Anubhavbindu*, *Panchikaran*, *Chiiavicharsamvad*, *Gurusishya Samvad*, *Kaivalyagita*, and *Paramapadaprapiti* in Gujarati; and *Panchadasitatparya* and *Brahmalila* in Hindi.

In all the works by Akho, the philosophy of *Advaitvad* is reflected in one or the other form. Not only is this, but the master sentiment of all his works - *brahmaras*, *brahma satyam jaganmithya*, *jivo brhamev napar*. Akho's works make such an impression that he follows the doctrine of Shankaracharya's Vedanta: '*Kevaladavita*' (**Absolute Monism**) which is indicated from the above line and it seems that it is the aim of Akho's poetic activity.

*Akhegita*: Composed in 1649, '*Akhegita*' is really the flower of Akho's perfect and mature intellect. It is the magnum opus of Akho. It is the testimony to everything that Akho arrived



at as a result of serious reflection and personal experience of a life time. In this work, he has explained in simple, direct, lucid style, the true nature of Chitta *Shakti*, *Maya Shakti* and *Prakriti Shakti*, the greatness of Majesty of *Jana*, *Bhakti* and *Vairagya*, and the fundamental unity of *Jiva*, *Ishvara* and *Kaivalya Brahma*. The subject of 'Akhegita' is 'Atma-Vidya' and 'Brahma-Vidya'. Akho himself says that there is the dissolution of *Jiva* into *Brahman* in 'Akhegita'. (*jiva brahmamahe bhalyano bheda chhe*. - kadavu-35) Umashakar Joshi writes about 'Akhegita',

"Whatever there is in it is not the description of any theory, but it is the gist of experience of an awakened person who desires for self-realization. 'Akhegita' is the utterance of what Akho has acquainted."

Akho describes *Atma* in 'Akhegita'. For example " *jehne adhya anta ne Madhya nahi*" (17th Kadavun, 4) This description of *Atma* is the same for *Parabrahma*. There is the inclusion of *Brahman* in the body. The relation of *Atma-Paramatma* is eternal. '*Kutastha atma Brahman keval*' (18th Kadavun, 8). It is that element which can neither be held thorough speech nor can be seen through eyes.

*Je kevo e kahevaye nahi, shabdatit sadaya;*

*Anirvachani vachan bole, je nave vanimanhe.* (18th Kadavun, 9)

While informing that such an ineffable element is *Jiva* and *Shiva*, Akho writes: 'You are nothing but I, and I am nothing but you'. Akho gives the concept of *Kaivalya*, *Maya*, *Ishvara* and *Jiva*. According to him, when one gets the higher knowledge, the varieties cannot move him, rather he experiences the oneness and feels that in this varieties only one *Chaitanya* lives. This *Parabrahma* exists in everybody.

*Parabrahma vahni em jano, ghatghat rahiyo samai.*

In short non-dualism is Akho's uncontrollable aspiration:

*Jiv brahma manhe bhalyano bhed chhe;*

*E anubhavata advait thaye, avichal vani ved chhe.* (Kadavun 35 - 9)

If one gives up egoism and worships the ineffable, indestructible and immutable *Brahman*, he experiences the sweetness of the water in which sugar is mixed; likewise due to the union



of *Jiva* and *Shiva* one experiences the same such sweetness of Divine pleasure and the troubles of this world will disappear. "Jiva-Shiv te ek hoye, jyam salilama sarkara bhale.: (39th Kadavun, 9) Thus *Nar* and *Narayana* are not different but identical.

*Anubhavbindu* : 'Anubhavbindu' consists of 40 couplets or stanzas. *Anubhav* is that word which explains those mysterious experiences which are enjoyed by the seers of Veda and the saints-poets and devotees. The word *bindu* does not suggest 'smallness' but as Pundit Sukhalalji says in 'Gyanbindu' that -

"...'bindu' does not mean 'dot or point but it is such a book where there is the unification of grave thought."

Akho in this work weaves the matter of Veda and Upanishads like - efforts to understand the self and to recognize it in its original meaning and after having recognized it, Akho puts this experience in his possible grand language. *Atma* and *Paramatma* are identical and are not different from each other. By considering this experience, this realization and the experience of this *Advait* as the central point, this 'Anubhavbindu' is composed.

*Sukshma tevu sthul, sthul sukshma nahi antar;*

*Narikunjar chir, dhir thai juve patantar.*

*Brahman* is the Truth and the *Atma* is the part of this Brahman. In the picture of the *Narikunjara chir* (the arrangements of Women (women bodies) in such a way as to look like an elephant.) the women are drawn in such a way as to make it look like an elephant. Whosoever looks at the women in the picture sees multiplicity in it. But actually they are all in the elephant. They are not separate from the elephant. They are only one if we see the elephant. The same is in the case of *Brahman* and *Brahmand*. From the name only it shows that the *Brahman* is the part of this *Brahmand*. And if *Jiva* can understand this, then it can experience this feeling - 'I am in Hari and Hari is in me.'

## Conclusion:

Thus it can be said that Akho stands as a class by himself in the medieval period of Gujarati Literature. He has created some of the most beautiful poetry from Vedanta Philosophy and mystical experiences given by Shakaracharya. His poetry is noteworthy for the simplicity of



style in which the poet has expressed some of the most abstruse philosophical thoughts. As R. V. Pathak writes,

"Akho's main faith is in *Kevaladvaita*, but he loves God also. He has an urge to acquire God, and in this urge he gives the place to the feeling of being *Gopi* (Gopibhav)."

As Shri Umashankar Joshi says,

"Because of its strong and beautiful description of the experience of non-dualism in the philosophic poetry of Gujarati Language, 'Anubhavbindu' along with 'Akhegita' will be read for a long time."

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