

THE PATH TO MOKṢA IN THE VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA SYSTEM OF RĀMĀNUJA

THE PATH TO MOKṢA IN THE
VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA SYSTEM OF
RĀMĀNUJA

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The subject matter of this thesis is to single out what may be the unique philosophical and theological achievement of Rāmānuja; the jñāna-bhakti samuccaya (the integration of knowledge and devotion) in his mokṣopāya (scheme of release) is contrary to the common notion among scholars contributing to an erroneous belief that Rāmānuja's bhakti is a mere path of emotion. This modest investigation is primarily based on a careful examination of the genuine works of Rāmānuja, namely: Śrībhāṣya, Vedārthasaṁgraha, and Bhagavadgītābhāṣya.

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PREFACE

This work is an attempt to arrive at an impartial and objective appreciation of Rāmānuja's contribution to Indian religious philosophy. The term 'Vedānta' is often narrowly understood to denote the philosophical system of Sankara. In fact, the Sankarite type of idealism represents only one of the many schools of Vedānta. The theistic systems of Vedānta have generally received less attention than they deserve. Therefore, it is felt that this rather neglected and insufficiently explored, yet important, field should be paid due attention.

Rāmānuja's greatest contribution to the Indian religious tradition is his new and unique interpretation of the term 'bhakti', which is quite often misunderstood by the scholars of advaita as a mere path of emotion. But this work, being an impartial evaluation of Rāmānuja's religious philosophy, will show that bhakti, in his view point, is a category of knowledge and the only means to liberation.

A comprehensive study of the religious system of Rāmānuja necessarily entails a systematic and thorough investigation of the conditions preceding it. So we have presented Rāmānuja's doctrine in comparison with that of Sankara in order to furnish the ideological background against which Rāmānuja worked.

Now we will proceed to make a brief structural survey of the dissertation, the subject matter whereof will be divided mainly into

six chapters and a concluding chapter. The first chapter will locate Rāmanuja in the Vedānta tradition and describe him as an ācārya faithful to the fundamental teachings of Vedānta, with a special fascination for theism. The second chapter will explain his doctrine of God which vividly describes God as the possessor of numerous auspicious qualities and saviour of every being. The third chapter will explicate the status of jīvātman. The fourth chapter will bring out the central point of the dissertation; namely, that bhakti, as a means of release, is not a mere expression of religious feeling, but a kind of knowledge based primarily on the understanding of the real nature of the Supreme Person and of the individual soul. The fifth chapter will continue this inquiry into the nature of bhakti and prapatti, which, indeed, indicate the emotional side of his religious system. It seems, however, that Rāmanuja has taught only one path to mukti and that is the way of bhakti. The same chapter will reflect the controversy between two groups of his followers regarding the understanding of divine grace and human response to it, and it is shown that both these schools could not comprehend the full dimension of Rāmanuja's philosophy.

The sixth chapter will describe the nature of the state of release, which is not a merger into Brahman but, on the contrary, indicates the persistence of individuality. In fact, the release is the result of the expansion of intelligence or consciousness (dharma-bhūta jñāna) which is the essential nature of the individual soul. In other words, Rāmanuja is not describing mokṣa as heaven, as it is depicted in the popular religious movements, but as a

state of consciousness in which the souls live in a state of union with one another and with God who is their real soul. Finally, we will arrive at the conclusion that the theistic Hinduism has been elevated to a higher altitude by the religious Philosophy of Rāmanuja which could infuse a philosophical content into the term 'bhakti'. Therefore, Rāmanuja could be held responsible for the revival of theism as a philosophic system.

It is with great pleasure that the author records his obligations. First of all, the author acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Professor John G. Arapura of McMaster University, under whose guidance he has carried out his research. Professor Arapura moulded the author's ways of thinking and gave direction to this study and above all filled him with a strong desire to pursue this inquiry in a critical and comparative manner. Secondly, the author owes a debt to Professor T. R. V. Murti, also of McMaster University, for his many constructive criticisms and helpful suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

Rāmānuja can claim legitimately to be the first and greatest architect of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. In fact, he was influenced by the philosophy of Vedānta on the one hand and by the theistic system of Pañcarātra¹ on the other. Rāmānuja successfully integrated these two divergent traditions, i.e. the Upaniṣad - inspired monism and theism in his religious thought. While Advaitins treated bhakti as a mere path of emotion suitable only to illiterate and the lower castes,² Rāmānuja adopted it as the central theme of his religious philosophy and added a new dimension to it by interpreting it as a philosophical category. Bhakti, according to him, is not essentially a path of emotion, but a special form of knowledge that fills the heart of the individual with deep feeling of attachment for the Supreme Person.³ Thus Rāmānuja became the first thinker who succeeded in transforming devotional religion into a real philosophical system. While advocating the supremacy of bhakti saturated with knowledge, he has tried to bring about a reconciliation with karma by personalizing it.

1

See Rāmānuja's exegesis of Vedānta Sūtra, 11.ii.40.

2

Kalpatāru, quoted in S. Radhakrishnan's The Brahma Sūtra, translation and Introduction (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 127.

3

See Chapter IV.

The Life and Work of Rāmānuja

It is worth noting that South India has been the home of subtle philosophies and great religious movements; for whosoever may have chanted the Vedas or developed their philosophical implications originally, the most striking and valuable presentations of these as coherent philosophical systems came from South India - from Sankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, and Śrīkantha.

Rāmānuja was born in 1017 A.D.,⁴ at Sriperumbudur of Tamil Nadu State. He received his formal religious training, together with his cousin Govinda Bhaṭṭa, from Yādavaprakāśa, a famous teacher of advaita, who tried to elucidate every Upaniṣadic passage in the light of monism, which Rāmānuja often refuted. After having listened to Yādavaprakāśa's interpretation of the great philosophical proposition, "Truth, knowledge and infinite is Brahman",⁵ Rāmānuja gave a new exposition from the point of view of Viśiṣṭādvaita. The tradition states that Yādavaprakāśa not only rejected the interpretation of Rāmānuja, but also arranged a plot to annihilate him.⁶ But later Rāmānuja was reconciled to his teacher and studied with him.

4

S. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), Vol. III, p. 100. But Radhakrishnan gives 1027 A.D. as the date of birth of Rāmānuja, see his Indian Philosophy, (Eighth Impression, London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1966), Vol. II, p. 665. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar says that "Rāmānuja was born in Sāka 938 corresponding to 1016 or 1017 A.D.," see his Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems (Varanasi: Indological Book House, Reprint, 1962), p. 51. R. D. Karmarkar also agrees with Dasgupta; see his Srībhāṣya of Rāmānuja (Poona: University of Poona, 1959), p. xv. Swami Ramakrishnananda also maintains 1017 A.D. (939 of Sāka era) as the date of Rāmānuja's birth; see his Life of Śrī Rāmānuja (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1965), p. 72.

5

Taittirīya Upaniṣad, II.1 "satyam, jñānam anantam Brahma".

6

Dasgupta, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 101.

Rāmānuja again fell out with his teacher on the meaning of the text, 'Kapyāsam puṇḍarīkam,'⁷ which Yādava explained means that Brahman had his eyes like the red buttocks of a monkey. But Rāmānuja repudiated the exposition of his teacher and presented a new interpretation. His new rendering runs as follows: 'ka' means 'water', and 'pibati' means 'drinking', and, therefore, 'kapi' signifies that which drinks water, the Sun or the lotus stalk. 'Āsa' is to open, and 'puṇḍarika' is the lotus. So the import of the passage is that God has eyes like "the lotus which blooms before the morning Sun".⁸ This interpretation is no doubt strained and far-fetched, but it exhibits the extraordinary ingenuity of Rāmānuja.

As a result of this quarrel, Rāmānuja was driven out by Yādavaprakāśa. But Mahapūrṇa, a well-known Vaiṣṇava saint, imparted to Rāmānuja the essentials of Vaiṣṇava religion. Later Mahapūrṇa sent him to Goṣṭhipūrṇa for further learning. But he tested the faith and zeal of Rāmānuja through an ordeal. Rāmānuja could undergo the ordeal successfully and, therefore, Goṣṭhipūrṇa revealed the hidden truths of Tirumantra, the eight syllabled and three worded, pranava, namas Nārāyaṇa, to Rāmānuja. Then Rāmānuja became the steward of the Śrīrangam temple, which was corrupted by the Custodians.

⁷ Chāndogya Upaniṣad, I.vi.7. See six different meanings given in J. A. B. Van Buitenen's translation of Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1956), p 305.

⁸ Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, op. cit., para. 134, p. 290.

But Rāmanuja, by his will and effort, could make tremendous changes in the administration. He systematically organized the temple services.

Thenceforth, he renounced the domestic life and became attached completely to the worship of Nārāyaṇa. Many devotees gathered round him and became his disciples. Eventually Yādavaprakāśa, his former teacher, also joined Vaiṣṇavism and became his pupil under the new name of Govinda-dāsa.

The tradition says that Rāmanuja had a long life span of 120 years and he spend most of his time at Śrīrangam expounding the śāstras to his disciples. Rāmanuja, the great āchārya of Viśiṣṭādvaita School, died at Śrīrangam in 1059 Śāka era (1137 A.D.).⁹

Rāmanuja wrote extensive commentaries on the Brahma Sūtra and the Bhagavadgītā. His Vedāntasāra and Vedāntadīpa are abridged commentaries of the Brahma Sūtra. Finally, apart from these commentaries, he wrote an independent work called Vedārthasaṅgraha, which presents the essentials of the Viśiṣṭādvaita teaching.

Vaiṣṇavites believe that Rāmanuja wrote an independent work in prose called Gadya Traya. But we, after a thorough examination of the text, maintain that it is attributed to him by one of his later disciples.¹⁰

The Historical Context

Gauḍapāda stands out as an early exponent of Kevalādvaita.¹¹

9

Swami Ramakrishnananda, op. cit., p. 237.

10

See Chapter V.

11

T. M. P. Mahadevan, Gauḍapāda (Madras: University of Madras, 1960), p. 10-20.

Śankara who followed Gaudapāda brought the monistic thoughts under a complete system by his commentaries on the Brahm Sūtra, the Upaniṣads, and the Bhagavadgīta - the prasthānatrayī that constitute the foundation and supreme authority of the philosophy of Vedānta. Thus the advent of Śankara and his all-engrossing absolutism had already been an event of historic importance in the annals of India in as much as he developed, on the materials supplied by his predecessors, a complete system of metaphysics and justified its credentials by explaining it to be the only correct interpretation of Upaniṣadic texts.

Śankara's mind was dominated completely, it seems, by the one self-evident principle - the absolute unity of ultimate reality (including the identity of the Brahman and the self)¹² and its corollary - the illusory character¹³ of the world. Not bhakti but these philosophical truths were Śankara's passion, not the love of God primarily but these truths were the content of his preaching.

Śankara's relentless logic, his astounding dialectical acumen, and, above all, his peculiar knack for explaining the Vedic texts attracted the intelligentsia of the country. On the one hand, he dismissed the heretic nihilism of the Sūnyavādins, and on the other, he decried the efficacy of Karma as an ultimate means to liberation. Śankara thus succeeded in establishing a philosophy which prescribed the knowledge of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality as the only means to emancipation.

12

Śankara, Commentary on Māndūkya Upaniṣad with Gaudapāda's Kārika, translated and annotated by Swami Nikhlananda (Mysore: Śrī Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1955), Mantra. 3; 'Sarvaprapañcopaśame advaitasiddhih. sarvabhūtasṥas ca ātma eko dṛṣṭah syāt, sarvabhūtani cātmani.'

13

Ibid., II.6. 'Vaitathyam jagad-dṛśyānam bhedānam ādyantayor abhavat.'

Rāmānuja, who followed Śankara three centuries later, tried to prove from the same sources that the Ultimate Reality is an integral whole comprising the cit or conscious and acit or the unconscious, both of which constitute the body of Īśvara, and that Īśvara is the soul (śarīrī) of the entire universe. In Śankara's system, the universe consisting of the individual selves and matter is regarded as illusory (māyā). Rāmānuja repudiates the theory of māyā,¹⁴ and establishes the reality of the universe and also maintains oneness of reality as an integral whole without sacrificing the individualities of the selves. According to Rāmānuja, a body is dependent for its existence upon its soul. Hence, the world as the body of Brahman, cannot exist independently of its soul, Brahman; and it is from Brahman that the world derives its reality, whereas Śankara had thought that the reality of God necessitated a denial of the reality of the world. Rāmānuja reverses this position and roots the reality of the world directly in God. The question of whose interpretation is correct does not arise here. It is quite legitimate, however, on the part of Rāmānuja to interpret the scriptures in such a way as to build a strong theological system against Śankara in defence of the viśiṣṭādvaita doctrines. J. A. B. Van Buitenen rightly observes that: "before Rāmānuja could start developing and elaborating the ideas of his teachers, he had to refute Śankara's entire philosophy and to prove that the great revelations of the Upaniṣads admitted of a very different interpretation".¹⁵

14

See the arguments in the second Chapter.

15

J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgīta (S - Gravenhage: H. L. Smits, 1953), p. 3.

The controversies centered mainly around nine topics:

- (1) Pramānas
- (2) Perception
- (3) The nature of Consciousness
- (4) The individual self and the Absolute
- (5) The Nirguna Brahman
- (6) Universe
- (7) The doctrine of Avidyā
- (8) Means of Mokṣa
- (9) No incompatibility between the two inquiries

The discussion on mokṣa covers the most important ontological issue; viz., whether or not the individual self is identical with the Absolute. One cannot fail to notice the idea, almost universal with practically every exponent of Indian Philosophy, of associating the causes of pain with the finite and limited character of the empirical self whose existence in this world is always related to certain extraneous conditions not belonging to its essential nature.

Mokṣa, according to Śankara, is the very nature of the self and it is not a state to be newly attained. It is self realization.¹⁶ It is owing to avidyā that the jīva is in bondage and so Śankara repeatedly asserts that liberation is possible only through knowledge; i.e., by comprehending that the real nature of jīva is not its physical or psychic appearance, but its essential sacchidānanda character. The individual self is Brahman, there is in truth neither

16

Śankara built his main thesis on one of the famous upanīṣadic texts, tattvamasi (Ch.VI.9.4) means 'thou art that' and not 'that thou becomes'.

any bondage or release. The solution to the problem of liberation lies in realization and not in acquisition.¹⁷

Rāmānuja holds a different view, which is in direct conflict with the above doctrine. According to Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, the individual self (jīvātman) is an eternal spiritual entity distinct from Brahman, a spiritual monad of Brahman. God, the chief factor, comprehends in Himself matter and the souls, the reality may be regarded as advaita, one without a second. God, the substantive factor, directs and predominates over the attributive factors. Though the world of matter and souls have real existence of their own, they are entirely subject to the control of God in all their conditions. Here the 'qualified non-dualism' is not a synthesis of the distinctions between the attributive factors and the substantive factor, but that God, who is the soul of souls and matter, is one. It is the non-dualism of the qualified whole. Liberation, therefore, according to Rāmānuja, is not the merging of the individual soul into the absolute,¹⁸ but only the direct intuitive realization by the individual soul of its own essential nature as a mode of God. Rāmānuja admits that knowledge is the immediate cause of liberation. This knowledge, he says, is obtained by constant remembrance of God as the only object of devotion, which is called upāsana or dhyāna.¹⁹

17 /
Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, ed., Mahadeva Sāstrī Bākre (Third Edition, Bombay: Nirṇaya Sagar Press, 1934), I.i.4.

18
See Chapter VI.

19
See Chapter IV.

Rāmānuja built a strong theistic system on the foundation of Vedānta philosophy by making room for bhakti. As a result of this new interpretation of religion, the status of theism is elevated to high altitude and many people were attracted to the vitalized religion of bhakti. But it is doubtful if his disciples succeeded in continuing the mission of their Guru. They probably misunderstood his religious philosophy which is, indeed, the integration of Sāṅkhya and Yoga (Philosophy and Religion) in imitation of the Bhagavadgīta itself.

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF RĀMĀNUJA IN INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy of Rāmānuja is the confluence of two different streams of religious traditions, the orthodox Vedānta system and the Bhāgavata or the Pañcarātra tradition. Rāmānuja's greatness as a theologian consists in his ability to integrate these religious systems in an excellent manner.

Rāmānuja has a unique place among the eminent ācāryas of Vedānta. He, like other Vedāntists, deduced his philosophy from the Śāstra. His commentaries on the Brahma Sūtra and the Bhagavadgītā are considered to be the canon of Vaiṣṇavism. Rāmānuja not only achieved wonderful success in infusing a new life and spirit into the religious need of his followers, but also into the political, social, and, above all, the intellectual environment of his time. The negative contribution of Śankara's thought had a greater influence in the history of religious philosophy after him, in as much as it gave birth to a great movement - the Vaiṣṇavite or Bhakti movement that had its origin in the shortcomings of Śankara's system. According to George Thibaut, Rāmānuja is a more genuine and authentic interpreter of the Brahma Sūtra than Śankara, since, in his opinion, the Brahma Sūtras themselves do not lend any countenance to Śankara's māyāvāda, because of the introduction of which he is obliged to twist a good many Sūtras to yield a meaning

suitable to his own stand.¹

P. M. Modi, after a careful study of the Brahma Sūtra, has practically succeeded in deriving a new scheme, a sort of critical apparatus, which he applies to Śankara's commentary of the Brahma Sūtra and points out that in many places Śankara has, really consciously or unconsciously, twisted the meaning of the Brahma Sūtra to his own advantage.²

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan gives a comparative evaluation of Śankara's and Rāmānuja's positions thus:

Both Śankara and Rāmānuja were great exponents of the Vedānta. Their minds were driven to the same problem, their texts were practically the same, their methods were based on the same assumptions, and yet their results show striking differences.³

Rāmānuja's philosophy is based on the teachings of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, but as an exponent of the Viśiṣṭadvaita his expositions are different from those of Śankara, who, however, had inherited the advaitic tendency of Gauḍapāda. Numerous Vedic and Upaniṣadic passages have been cited by Rāmānuja in order to support his interpretation, which we will discuss in detail in the following chapters. But here, however, we may mention a few passages on which Rāmānuja has built his

¹
George Thibaut, Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmānuja's Commentary, ed. F. Max Muller, Sacred Books of the East (Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962), Vol. XLVIII, p. xx.

²
See P. M. Modi, A Critique of the Brahma Sūtra (Bhavanagar: P. M. Modi, 1943), Part I, p. 3.

³
S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 666-667.

cardinal doctrines. According to Rāmanuja, Svetāśvatāra Upaniṣad states that there are three eternal and distinctive entities which constitute the absolute; namely, the individual being, the Personal God, and Prakṛti.⁴ He makes use of a Bṛhadāraṇyaka⁵ passage in support of his theology of antaryāmin⁶ (the Inner Ruler). His idea of the Supreme Deity full of attributes is also formed on the basis of the Upaniṣads.⁷

Rāmanuja used not only the Vedāntic texts but also the Commentaries of the early exponents of the Vedānta and it is a fact that many of his interpretations rest on the expositions of the ancient masters. Rāmanuja gives a list of these masters of old in his Vedārthasaṃgraha⁸ in which he mentions Bodhāyana, Taṅka, Dramida, Kapardī, and Bhāruci.⁹ Śrīnivāsadāsa, the author of Yatīndramatadīpikā,¹⁰ has mentioned Vyāsa, Bodhāyana, Guhadeva, Bhāruci, Brahmanandin, Dramidācārya, Śrīparāṅkusanātha, Yāmunamuni, Yatīśvara

⁴ Svetāśvatāra Upaniṣad. I.9; jñājnau dvāv ajāv iśānīsāv ajā hy ekā bhokṛ-bhogyārtha-yuktā anantas cātmā viśva-rūpo hy akartā trayam yadā vindate brahman etat.

⁵ Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. III.vii.3; yaḥ pṛthivivvyām tiṣṭhan pṛthivya antaraḥ yam pṛthivī na veda, yasya pṛthivī śarīram, yaḥ pṛthivīm antaro yamayati, eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ.....etc.

⁶ Brahman abides in the souls and rules them. See the details in Chapter II.

⁷

Taittiriya Upaniṣad. II.i.1.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad. II.ii.7.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad. VIII.vii.1.

⁸

Rāmanuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, op. cit., para. 93, p. 128.

⁹

They are the early ācāryas of Vedānta and the commentators of the Brahma Sūtra who maintain that bhakti is the major path of release but unfortunately most of their works are lost to us.

¹⁰

Yatīndramatadīpikā, (The light of the system of Yatīndra or Rāmanuja) was composed by Śrīnivāsadāsa, a well known Viśiṣṭādvaita philosopher who lived in Tirupati in the beginning of the 17th century.

(Rāmānuja), in the beginning of his book as the propounders of the system.¹¹ The followers of Rāmānuja believe that the system was taught by several teachers who flourished before Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja, in his Sribhāṣya,¹² writes that Bodhāyana¹³ wrote a very elaborate work on the Brahm Sūtra and that in writing his own Commentary he has closely followed the interpretation found in the Bodhāyana Vṛtti. The Bodhāyana Vṛtti on which Rāmānuja depended a great deal for writing his Commentary was a work in the line of bhakti. So it was more favourable to Rāmānuja's rather than to Śankara's system of Vedānta.

Rāmānuja quotes Bodhāyana in his writings, particularly in the Sribhāṣya and the Vedārthasaṅgraha which we are going to analyse critically. In the Vedānta systems, as a rule, the discussions center around the meaning of the first words of the Vedānta Sūtra: "subsequently therefore, arises the desire to know Brahman" atāto braham jijnāsa). Can this mean that the desire for mokṣa through knowledge is conditioned by something that precedes it? Bodhāyana says and Rāmānuja quotes: "The desire of knowing Brahman arises immediately after the acquisition of Karman".¹⁴ Bodhāyana's view

¹¹ /
 Śrīnivāsadāsa, Yatīndramatadīpikā, trans. Swami Adidevananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1949), p. 2.

¹²
 Rāmānuja, Sribhāṣya, I.i.1. the first sentence: Bhagavad Bodhāyana kṛtam vistīrnam Brahma Sūtra Vṛttim pūrvacāryas sañcikṣipuh tanmatānusāreṇa sūtrākṣaraṇi vyākhyasyante.

¹³
 Bodhāyana is an early commentator of Purva and Uttara - Mīmamsa Sūtras, which in his time seem to have been treated as constituting one śāstra in two parts, not two different branches of knowledge and this Commentary went by the name of 'Kṛtakoti'. See S. Dasgupta, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 105ff. and also J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṅgraha, op. cit., p. 19ff.

¹⁴ /
Sribhāṣya, I.i.1. Para. 3. "tadāha Vṛttikāra:- Vṛttāt

was indeed what is expressed as 'jñāna karma samuccaya', i.e. the combination of both knowledge and act. This teaching influenced Rāmānuja very much and that is the reason why he advocated ritual acts as preparatory to the liberating intuition of the Absolute. In this connection, Rāmānuja again cites the passage from Bodhāyana Vṛtti in which the Vṛttikāra says that the Karma - mīmāṃsā and the Brahma - mīmāṃsā have the nature of one śāstra.

This śāstra dealing with the embodied (soul) has been welded together by the treatise of Jaimini in sixteen chapters and so is proved the oneness of the (two) śāstras.¹⁵

It is worth noting that Rāmānuja intends to treat the pūrva and uttara Mīmāṃsā as earlier and later parts of one science possibly deriving the suggestion from Bodhāyana's treatment. In connection with the discussion on the nature of the Ātman, Rāmānuja cites the Vṛttikāra: "(The Ātman) is akin to light when free from involvement in the world's activities".¹⁶ This is decided by the union and non-union as in the text "with the existent, my dear, does he become united".¹⁷

14 (Con't.)
karmādhigamād anantaram brahmavividiṣa".

15
Ibid., trans. R. D. Karmarkar, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 4:
samhitma etad sarīrakam Jaiminīyena ṣoḍasalakṣaṇeneti śātraikatva
siddhi.

16
Śrībhāṣya. I.i.1. (Para. 57.): jagad vyāpāra varje śamano
jyotiṣā.

17
Ibid., I.i.10. (Para. 122.): satā somya tadā sopanno
bhavati iti sampattya sampattibhyām etad avasīyate.

According to Rāmānuja, Paramātma is the cause of the universe as qualified by the sentient and non-sentient in their subtle state; Brahman is the effect as qualified by the sentient and non-sentient in their gross state; and therefore, the effect is nondifferent from the cause. Then he quotes Bodhāyana in support of his view where the latter says, "Brahman the Lord is indeed all (and) the soul of all".¹⁸ Further, Rāmānuja seeks to show that Brahman is Bhūma and to this end he cites Bodhāyana again. "Brahman is Bhūma (the vast one) in view of the teaching on that (subject which says that) Brahman exceeds the things which have come into being through the progression of name, etc.". ¹⁹ Rāmānuja quotes another text from Bodhāyana's Vṛtti in order to support his religious conviction that Brahman itself is the object of worship.

There is, indeed, the possibility in the case of Madhu (Vidyā) and others on account of Brahman alone being everywhere fit to be meditated upon.²⁰

Rāmānuja makes it clear that the Bodhāyana Vṛtti is an extensive one, but has quoted only fragments from the first chapter. Here a legitimate question arises: how much did Rāmānuja know of Bodhāyana himself? Dasgupta relates the story of how Rāmānuja got the Bodhāyana Vṛtti.²¹ Rāmānuja, with Kureśa, visited the Sāradā Math in Kashmir

18

Ibid., I.ii.1. (Para. 161.): yadāha vṛttikāra: sarvam khalv asti sarvatmā brahmesaḥ.

19

Sribhāṣya. I.iii.7. (Para. 184.): Bhūma tu eveti bhūma brahma nāmādiparamparayāt nāmna ūrdhvam asyopadesāt.

20

Ibid., I.iii.33. (Para. 198.) Trans. R. D. Karmarkar, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 454: "asti hi madhvādiṣu sambhavo brahmaṇa eva sarvatra nicāyyatvāt".

21

S. Dasgupta, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 102-103.

and Kureśa procured the manuscript of the Bodhāyana Vṛtti and then they proceeded to Srīrangam. The keepers of Math, however, finding the manuscript missing, chased him and took it away. But Kureśa had learnt it by heart during the several nights on the way. Kureśa could remember its purport and so was able to repeat it. Thus Rāmānuja used the memory of Kureśa to quote Bodhāyana while he wrote his śrībhāṣya.

Apart from Bodhāyana, Rāmānuja quotes regularly from Dramiḍa's Bhāṣya. The first fragment of Dramiḍabhāṣya quoted in Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha and Śrībhāṣya is as follows:

Since they want to obtain the results they desire, they want to propitiate, with acts like sacrifice,When He has been propitiated with those acts, He grants the results they desire.²²

He says that Vedas speak of merit and demerit as the actions constituted by the worship of the highest Puruṣa. In other words, the Lord's pleasure and displeasure then brings either happiness or suffering, as the case may be, to the individual who has done this action. In this connection, Rāmānuja again quotes Dramiḍa:

In obedience to His command the wind blows, the rivers flow; by Him the oceans have been confined and they spring like rams as if they were rutting and for being dependent on His will the world neither falls nor bursts asunder. When the Venerable Lord knows that someone follows His commandments, then He makes him prosper in His mercy, for He knows and is capable of acting.²³

22

Vedārthasaṃgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, op. cit., para. 124, p. 278: "phalāsambibhatsayā hi karmabhir ātmānam pīpṛisanti sa pṛīto 'lam phalāyeti sāstramaryādā." See Śrībhāṣya. II.ii.3.

23

Vedārthasaṃgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, op. cit., para. 125, p. 281: "tasyājñayā dhāvati vāyurnādyā śravanti tena ca kṛtasīmāno jalasayaḥ samada iva mesa visarpitam kurvanti iti tat saṃkalpanibandhanā hīme loke na cyavante nā sphuṭante."

Dramiḍa's God is a merciful sovereign who rules all over the worlds as an emperor. Dramiḍa believed that object of our knowledge is the personal deity who possessed of a supra sensible body.

The form of the creator of all is His by nature; however, it cannot be grasped by the eye, it can only be apprehended by the untroubled mind which has another means; this on account of sruti.²⁴

Rāmānuja adopts this idea from Dramiḍa and says that the Supreme Person Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Lord of all, has a beautiful shape which is in accordance with His pleasure.

Taṅka also comments on the form of the Supreme Person and .

Rāmānuja quotes:

The sruti the golden person is regarded teaches that the one who is knowing is within everything, because we learn that He is the lord of the world and the desires, and also because He is beyond sin.²⁵

Bodhāyana, Dramiḍa, and Taṅka were quite unambiguous in their theistic approach which had a remarkable influence on Rāmānuja and his School. Śankara pays compliment to these early Vedānta commentators and accepts their interpretation where he can safely do so and leaves many passages without any comment.

Rāmānuja and the Pañcarātra System

Rāmānuja incorporated all Hindu religious literature, particularly

24

Vedārthasaṅgraha, Van Buitenen, op. cit., para. 135, p. 291: "añjasaiva viśvasrjo rūpam. tat tu na cakṣuṣā grāhyam manasā tv akaluseṇa sādhanāntaravataḥ grhyate- na cakṣuṣā grhyate nāpi vācā manasā tu viśuddhena iti sruteh."

25

Ibid., "hiraṇmayah puruṣo drśyata iti prajñah sarvāntarah syāt loke kame vyapadeśāt tathā dayāt pāpmanām."

the Pañcarātra into his theological system. But Śankara refutes the teachings of the Bhāgavata or the Pañcarātra school in his Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra.²⁶ Rāmanuja, on the contrary, interprets the Pañcarātra literature in the light of Vedānta and he asserts that the doctrines of Pañcarātra are in harmony with Sruti, and he further comments that the Pañcarātra system is not refuted by Badarayana, the author of the Brahma Sūtra. In this connection, he quotes from the Pauṣkara Samhitā, the Sātvata Samhitā, and the Parama Samhitā.²⁷ Śankara accuses²⁸ the Pañcarātra of treating the Vedas with contempt, since it is stated in one of their books that Śaṇḍilya, not having found the way to the highest good in the four Vedas, had recourse to this Śāstra.

Ramanuja, replying to²⁹ this accusation of Śankara, shows that all similar statements occur in the Chandogya Upaniṣad.³⁰ When Narada acknowledges to Sanatkumara that he has studied all the Vedas

²⁶ Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.ii.42-43.

²⁷ Sribhāṣya, II.ii. 39-42. II.ii.42: bhagavat prakriyamajana-tamidam codyam yad jivotpatti virudhābhihitoti. Vāsudevākhyam param brahmaivāsritavatsalam svāsritasamāśrayaniyatvāya svaccheyā caturthāvatīṣṭate, iti hi tat prakriya. tathā pauṣkara samhitāyām.

²⁸ Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.ii.45.

²⁹ Sribhāṣya, II.ii.43.

³⁰ Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.i and ii, quoted in Sribhāṣya. II.ii.43: "yatha ca bhūmavidya prakrame nārādēna. Rgvedam bhagavo adhyemi Yajurvedam Sāmavedam atharvānam so ahamam bhagavo mantra vide asmi na ātmavit".

and other branches of learning, still he only knows the mantras and not the ātman. The object of the statement is simply to extol the bhūmavidyā and not to find fault with the Veda. Precisely the same interpretation could be put on this statement of Sāṅḍilya.

The History of the Pañcarātra System

The Pañcarātra system is a reformed religious movement built on the principles of the Pañcarātra Samhitas.³¹ Otto Schrader maintains that the Pañcarātra "would be a designation of the ancient Vaiṣṇavite system".³² This system worships a Supreme Deity, namely Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva was recognized as the Supreme Deity even in the time of Patanjali, for under Pāṇini IV.3.98, the author of the Mahabhāṣya states that Vāsudeva occurring in the Sūtra is not the name of a Kṣatriya, but of 'tatrābhagavat', which term is explained by Kaiyata as signifying a certain Supreme Deity.³³ It shows that the Bhagavata religion of bhakti is as old as Pāṇini himself.³⁴

31

An ideal Samhita consists of four quarters (padas) teaching respectively jñāna, yoga, kriya (making of images and construction of temples), carya (rituals).

32

Otto Schrader, Introduction to the Pañcarātra (Madras: Adyar Library, 1916), p. 24. Schrader explicates the significance of the term Pañcarātra: 1) "The Pañcarātra means five nights; the names of the rātras are Brahma, Śiva, Indra, and Ṛṣi Rātra, the fifth is not in the manuscript" (p. 23); 2) The name of Pañcarātra signifies that it deals with five subjects; Ontology (tattva), liberation (mukti-prada), devotion (bhakti-prada), yoga (yaugika), the object of sense (Vaiśeṣika).

33

R. G. Bhandarkar, Vāsudeva of Pāṇini, IV.iii.98, Collected Works of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, ed. Nārāyaṇa Utgikar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), p. 82: "kimartha Vāsudeva śabdāt vijñadhīyate. na gotra kṣatriyākhyebhyo bahulam vṛṅteva siddham na hasti viśeṣo Vāsudeva śabdādnjo vā tadeva rūpam sa eva svarah. athava naiṣa kṣatriyākhyā samjñaiṣa tatrābhagavat."

34

R. G. Bhandarkar, 'On the dates of Patañjali and the King in

The Pañcaratra system is mentioned along with the rival systems in the Narayaniya section of the Mahabharata. Narada is represented to have gone to the Badarikasrama to see Nara and Narayana. Narayana was engaged in the performance of religious rites. Narada asked Narayana whom he was worshipping. Narayana answered Narada that he worshipped his original prakṛti, the source of all that is and that is to be.

Bhandarkar points out that the Narayaniya section of Mahabharata is written much earlier than the time of Patañjali. "In Patañjali's work we find in one place the names of Bhimasena, Sahadeva and Nakula, who are mentioned as descendants of Kuru." ³⁵ The Besnagar pillar inscription of the 2nd century B.C. bears evidence to the worship ³⁶ of Vasudeva in the temple. Bhandarkar, therefore, unequivocally shows that the monotheistic cult of Vaiṣṇavism developed as a strong

34 (Con't.)

whose reign he lived', Indian Antiquary, Vol. V, 1872, pp. 229ff. "We see that Patañjali lived in the reign of Puṣpamitra and that he probably wrote the third chapter of his bhāṣya between 144 B.C. and 142 B.C." Also see, Ratilal Mehta, Pre-Buddhistic India (Bombay: Examiner Press, 1939), p. 25.

35

R. G. Bhandarkar, 'Consideration of the date of the Mahābhārata', Collected Works of R. G. Bhandarkar, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 83. Cf. Ibid., p. 423: "If we judge from the language we shall find that it is not in strict conformity with the rules of Pāṇini. This is a stage in the growth of the Sanskrit language at which Pāṇini's idiom was not strictly cared for, and a great deal of freedom was used --but the sounds of the language at that stage had not become corrupt by passing through the mouths of foreign races....This stage in the growth of the language belongs to a period later than Yāska and Pāṇini."

36

Bhandarkar, Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems, op. cit., p. 3.

religion which had a considerable following in the second century B.C.³⁷

According to Bhandarkar, the religious systems that had sprung up during those days were mostly atheistic.³⁸ It was necessary at that time for systems such as the Bhāgavata to counteract this tendency.³⁹ The Bhāgavata religion is an attempt to introduce a religious reform on more conservative principles. "The repudiation of the slaughter of animals and the inefficiency of the sacrificial worship and austerities are common to the religious reform with Buddhism".⁴⁰ But Buddhism could not satisfy the religious instinct of the common man who longed for a God who could receive and reward passionate devotion. So in the Bhāgavata religion 'the Supreme Lord Hari is worshipped with devotion'.⁴¹

The doctrine of the Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja is ultimately the same as the one professed by the more ancient school of Pañcarātra. Vāsudeva is the Supreme Deity of Pañcarātra and the Viśiṣṭādvaita also worships the same deity.⁴² God is described as free from three

37

Ibid., p. 39, and also see Schrader, op. cit., p. 17.

38

Bhandarkar, Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems, op. cit., p. 29.

39

Ibid.

40

Ibid., p. 7.

41

Ibid.

42

The names Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa are often used in Rāmānuja's writings. See Srībhāṣya. II.ii.42; "Brahman Vāsudevākhyayājīnām" (The highest Brahman is called Vāsudeva.)

gunas in the Pañcarātra and Rāmānuja stresses this point very much. This description does not mean that God is without any qualities; on the contrary, He is the possessor of numerous attributes.⁴³ The Pañcarātra describes six attributes (ṣad guṇas) of the Lord which Rāmānuja had adopted into his religious thought.⁴⁴ Rāmānuja, without any hesitation, incorporated the theory of Vyūha (chain of emanation) in his theological doctrine. Each emanation except the first (Vāsudeva), originates from an anterior emanation and thus this process has the same law as that of one flame proceeding from another. The worship of this four-fold form means the worship of the Supreme Brahman called Vāsudeva.⁴⁵ The bhakti as the way to liberation is also common in the Pañcarātra and the Viśiṣṭādvaita. This remarkable parallelism between the Bhāgavata tradition and the Rāmānuja School naturally leads us to infer that the Bhāgavata religion had influenced Rāmānuja's thought a great deal.

The Bhāgavata system did not owe its origin to the Vedas or the Upaniṣads, but Rāmānuja incorporated its literature in order to

⁴³ Sribhāṣya. III.ii.11; I.i.1, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya. XIII.ii.

⁴⁴ jñāna (knowledge), aiśvarya (Lordship), śakti (potency), bala (strength), vīrya (virility), and tejas (splendour) are the six attributes of Vāsudeva described in the Pañcarātra. See Sribhāṣya. III.ii.11 for Rāmānuja's opinion: "tejobalaisvarya mahāvabodha suvīrya saktādi guṇarkarāśi."

⁴⁵ Sribhāṣya. II.ii.42: bhagavat prakriyāmājanatāmīdam codyam yad jivotpatti virudha abhilitā - iti Vasudevākhyam param brahmaivāsrita vatsalam svāsrita samāśrayāniyatvāya svecchayā catūrdhā avatiṣṭata iti hi tat prakriya. yatha pauskara samhitāyām "kartavyatvena vai yatra caturātmya upāsyate. kramāgatais sva samjñābhīh brahmanairāgam tu tat".

justify the devotional theism of the Vaiṣṇavism. But the concept of bhakti as it is depicted by Rāmānuja in his Sribhāṣya⁴⁶ is different from the bhakti of the Pañcarātra. As an ācārya of Vedānta, he infused more elements of knowledge (jñāna) into the framework of bhakti and described bhakti as a category of knowledge. As the result of this integration, the content of the knowledge is also slightly changed, which has been repeatedly explained by Rāmānuja in his Sribhāṣya.⁴⁷ This knowledge is not a mere knowledge of pure academic kind, but a knowledge that arises as the result of real confrontation with Ultimate Reality. In this respect, it is not inferior to perception (pratyakṣa). A steady remembrance of this kind is designated by the word devotion (bhakti), for this term has the same meaning as meditation (upāsana).⁴⁸ According to Rāmānuja, karmayoga purifies the soul and leads one to jñānayoga. This knowledge consists in seeing oneself as the mode (prakāra) and slave (śeṣa) of the Supreme Person leading to bhakti.

It is interesting to note that Yāmuna did not attempt to reconcile the mysticism of Bhāgavata with Vedānta monism.⁴⁹ But Rāmānuja

46

- Ibid., I.i.1, (Para. 14-15): "seyam smṛti darsāna rūpā pratipadita darsāna rūpatā ca pratykṣatāpatti".

47

Sribhāṣya. III.ii.23.

48

Ibid., I.i.1. This point has been elaborated in the fourth chapter of this Dissertation.

49

C. H. Vadeville, 'Love Symbolism in Bhāgavata Tradition', The Journal of The American Oriental Society, Vol. LXXXII, No. 1, p. 31.

accepted a more intellectual and static conception of bhakti and tended to effect a compromise with Vedānta doctrines. It was Rāmānuja's effort to combat the doctrine of māyā and seek a Vedāntic and philosophic basis for the religion of bhakti that had existed from time immemorial. There is a striking similarity⁵⁰ in the manner of approach between the author of the Bhagavadgītā and Rāmānuja. In fact, the author of the Gītā, with his unique method of synthesis, could liberate a portion of smṛti and elevate it in practice almost to the level of śruti.

The uniqueness of Rāmānuja's position in the history of Indian philosophy and religion consists in the fact that he was the first great thinker who tried to construct a complete system of philosophy on the basis of the bhakti tradition. As a champion amongst the defenders of theism in India, Rāmānuja's contribution is almost as great as that of St. Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period of Western philosophy and theology.

50

Van Buitenen points out the similarities: "just as the Bhagavadgītā seeks to reconcile within the Orthodox Brahmanism monism and theism, Ramanuja seeks to reconcile within the Orthodox Vedānta - unity and distinctness in the Universe". See his Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 4.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE SUPREME PERSON

The description of the nature of mokṣa in every system of Indian philosophy generally depends on its conception of the individual and his relation to the Supreme Being. Therefore, in this chapter, we will focus our attention on the nature and the status of the Supreme Person as it is depicted in the School of Rāmānuja's viśiṣṭāvaita. But the viśiṣṭāvaita concept of the Supreme Person could be interpreted best only by comparison and contrast with the parallel views of advaita vedānta. As Rāmānuja was the first eminent and original thinker¹ of this movement, a correct assessment of his contribution to Indian religious thought requires a thorough understanding of the weak aspects of Śankarite thought for theology.

The definitions of Brahman in Advaita Vedānta

There is a two-fold presentation of the Absolute (Brahman) in the advaita vedānta. Brahman is defined both as svarūpalakṣaṇa²

¹
Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. III, p. 139ff.
Cf. Van Buitenen, Vedārthasaṁgraha, op. cit., pp. 44-48.

²
Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, trans. George Thibaut, SBE (Reprint, Delhi: Motild Banarsidass, 1962), Vol. XXXIV, Part I, p. 14. I.i.1: "Brahman which is all-knowing and endowed with all powers, whose essential nature is eternal purity, intelligence and freedom". Also see Ibid., I.i.15: "satyam jñānam anantam brahma" ityasmin mantre yat prakṛtam brahma satya jñāna ananta viśeṣanairnirdharitam.

(essential or substantial; nirguṇa Brahman), and tatasthalakṣaṇa³ (accidental; sagūṇa Brahman; Īśvara). Śankara contends that we are primarily concerned with the svarūpalakṣaṇa, because it gives us the essential nature of Brahman and tells us what it is. In Śankara's opinion, the main goal or objective of the upanīṣadic writers is to teach us that there exists one Reality called Brahman and to set forth the nature of that Reality.⁴ There are three major definitions of Brahman as svarūpalakṣaṇa; sat (Being), cit (Consciousness), and ānanda (Bliss). To say that Brahman is sat, cit, and ānanda (pure being, pure knowledge, and absolute bliss), is not to say that they belong to Brahman as attributes, but rather that they constitute the essential nature of Brahman. For to know Brahman's intrinsic nature is to know Brahman as eternal, pure Being as having the nature of intelligence or pure knowledge and absolute bliss. These three definitions of Brahman do not point to three different Brahman, but define the one and the same Brahman differently. When Brahman is looked at in the light of svarūpalakṣaṇa, Brahman is known as eternity, purity, consciousness, infinity, and freedom.

Śankara's description of svarūpalakṣaṇa (nirguṇa Brahman)

Brahman as svarūpalakṣaṇa is Brahman absolutely destitute or

³ Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sutra, I.i.2.

⁴ Ibid., I.i.4.: "sarveṣu hi vedānteṣu vakyāni tatparyeṇa tasya arthasya pratipādakatvena samānugatāni. Sadeva somyedamagra āsit ekamevādvitīyam (Chāndogya Upanīṣad, VI.ii.1) ātmā va idam eka evāgra āsit (Aitarīya, II.i.1).

devoid of qualities. According to Śankara, those passages in the Upaniṣads which refer to the unqualified Brahman as describing the real nature of Brahman are the essential ones. For instance, Śankara says that the following passage in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad aptly describes the unqualified Brahman.

Yājñavalkya said "that O Gargi, the knowers of Brahman call the imperishable. It is neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor long, neither red nor moist; it is neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor akāśa; it is unattached, it is without taste or smell, without eyes or ears, without tongue or mind,...it does not eat anything, nor is it eaten by anyone.⁵

It is Śankara's conviction that the non-determinate rather than the determinate describes the true nature of Brahman.⁶ Through this negative description of Brahman in the above passage, the teacher, Yājñavalkya, declares that Brahman is so utterly transcendent that it cannot be described with qualities or attributes. Śankara contends that the 'neti' 'neti' texts should have precedence over those texts which describe with qualities, because it is these negative descriptions of Brahman which point to the non-phenomenal character of Brahman, to

⁵
The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śankarācārya, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1950), p. 517.

⁶
Cf. Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sutra, III.ii.14: "rūpādyakāra rahitameva brahmāvadhārāyitavyam na rūpādītam kasmāt tat pradhānatvāt. asthulamānamvāharsvamādirdhama (Bṛhadāraṇyaka III.viii.8) aśabdān asparśam arūpam, avyayam (Kātha III.15) ...tasmāt evam jātiyakeṣu vākyeṣu yathā śrutam nirākaram eva brahmāvadhārāyitavyam. "Brahman ought only to be understood to be without any form etc. and not as having a form...therefore, as expressed in such passages in the scriptures, brahma should be understood to be without any form", Brahma Sūtra Śankara Bhasya, trans. V. M. Apte (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1960), p. 585.

the absolute transcendence of Brahman. To describe Brahman as 'neti' 'neti' (not this, not this),⁷ is a refusal to limit the nature of Brahman. Another negative description of Brahman, which gives us the nature of Brahman, is the argument from silence; this, the advaitin declares, is the most positive assertion by the vedic seers of the absolute transcendence of Brahman. Brahman cannot be described by words or by speech. Dr. John Arapura throws more light on this problem. "Undoubtedly, implicit truth is what is intended in Sruti statements, but stated truth pre-supposes extension and therefore distinction....Nevertheless, the irony of having to make implicit truth explicit may sometimes be dramatically expressed in silence." According to him, Bāhva's silence⁹ before Vāṣkali is an outstanding example of such a dramatic expression. So Dr. Arapura explicates this dramatic event and points out that Śankara's intention of narrating this episode is just to express the irony of having to say

7 -
Yajñavalkya sums up his speculations five times in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad: IV.ii.4, IV.iv.22, IV.v.15, III.ix.26, II.iii.6. See Śankara's Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, III.ii.22: "tatra prakṛtatva viśeṣādubhayamāpi pratiṣedhat ityāsankamaha. dvau caitau pratiṣedhau dvir neti śabda-prayogat.tayorekena saprapaṅcam brahmaṇo rupam pratisidhyate apareṇa rūpavahyeti; bhavati mati.

"There are two denials here, because the words 'not so' (neti) are used twice. We feel that by the first, the phenomenal aspects of Brahma are denied, and by the other, Brahma, of which they are the two phenomenal aspects, is denied". (trans. V. M. Apte, op. cit., p. 598).

8
J. G. Arapura, Maya and Discourse about Brahman (a paper presented at a conference on Eastern philosophy which was held at Brock University, 1968; unpublished), p. 1.

9
Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sutra, III.ii.17. When Bāhva was questioned by Vāṣkali, Bāhva maintained silence and when he was questioned the third time, he said: "Indeed I have told you (by my silence) but, of course you don't understand".
"Khalu tvam tu na vijñāsi. upasanto ayamātma".

10

what cannot be said.

Svarūpalakṣaṇa establishes then the utter transcendence of Brahman, and it means a denial of the subject-object relationship. Sankara, therefore, denied all attributes to the higher Brahman and held that it is the lower Brahman that possesses attributes.

The relation between God and Absolute has been an immensely difficult and complex problem in Indian thought. The Absolute is a metaphysical concept, signifying an ultimate supra-rational reality. God is essentially a concept of religious philosophy signifying a divine personality with whom communion and adjustment is possible for man. This satisfies some of the most vital spiritual needs of man. This God of religion is kept distinct from the Absolute of metaphysics in Advaita.

Strictly speaking, there is no transition from nirguna to saguna. The moment we try to bring Brahman within the categories of intellect and try to make this ultimate Being an object of thought, we miss its essential nature. Saguna Brahman, Sankara says, reflected through our intellect is the product of māyā.¹¹ Īsvara is the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman. The transition, therefore, takes place in the individual due to the limiting adjunct (adhyāsa) of avidyā.

10

J. G. Arapura, op. cit., p. 1.

11/

Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, I.iv.3.

Rāmānuja's criticism against Śankara's concept of nirguna Brahman

The concept of Īśvara as described by Śankara may appear incompatible with the Śankarite theory of the indeterminate Brahman. We may rightly be led to question whether the two conceptions of Brahman as qualified and unqualified are capable of being reconciled within a system of philosophy.

Rāmānuja repudiates the advaitic theory of the two-fold view of Brahman and asserts that the supreme reality is one, and that it is simultaneously nirguṇa and saguṇa. He explains it further in order to eliminate occasions for misunderstanding: the Supreme Person is nirguṇa in the sense that satva, rajas, and tamas do not exist in his essence (svarūpa) and saguṇa in the sense that all blessed qualities are his essential attributes.

In all the śruti and smṛti passages, it is stated that Brahman has characteristics of two kinds, which means that he is free from all evils (doṣatva) and possessed of all auspicious attributes (Kalyāṇa guṇa).¹¹ Rāmānuja points out that Brahman is saguṇa and saviśeṣa, having the ontological predicates of satyam, jñānam, anantam, and a treasury of all beautiful qualities. He cites a smṛti passage in order to substantiate his point:

All auspicious attributes are constituted
within Him and by a small part of his power all

¹¹ / Srībhāṣya. III.ii.11: "yataḥ sarvatra śruti smṛtiṣu param brahma ubhayalingam ubhayalakṣaṇam abhidhiyate, nirastanikhiladoṣatvakalyāṇa guṇakaravakṣaṇopetamityārthaḥ".

beings are supported. Splendour, strength, lordship, wisdom, virility, potency, and all other noble attributes are in Him. He is the highest of the high, no pain or other imperfections after him. The Highest one, the Lord of all is free from all evil.¹³

The fact that the Supreme Person is free from all imperfections is not only stated in Smṛti, but also in numerous śrutis.

Supreme Person is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst....whose desire is real and whose thought is the real.¹⁴

(Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VIII.i.5.)

The view that the representation of Brahman as Īśvara is a concession to the weakness of the human mind, as some advains¹⁵ hold,

13

Rāmaṇuja, Srībhāṣya, III.ii.11: "samsta kalyāṇa guṇatmakō asau svasakti-leśād-bhūtaśrayaḥ. tejo bala īśvarya mahābodha suvīrya śakti ādi guṇaikarāsi. Para paraṇām sakala na yatra kleśādayas santi parāvarese. samasta heya-rahitam-viṣṇvākhyam param padam".

14

Ibid.: "apahata pāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko vijighatso pipāsaḥ satya kāmeh satya samkalpaḥ".

15

Kalpatāru, quoted in Radhakrishnan, Brahm Sūtra, Translation and Introduction, p. 127: "nirviśeṣam param brahma sāksāt kartum anīśvarāḥ ye mandās te 'nukampyante saviśeṣanirupaṇaiḥ vaśikṛte manasy eṣām saguṇa brahma śīlanāt. tad evanirbhavet sāksāt abhedo upādhi kalpanam".

is not supported by the Vedānta Sūtra. V. S. Ghatē,¹⁶ like P. M. Modi,¹⁷ criticizes Śankara's interpretation of the Sūtra. P. N. Srinivāsachari,¹⁸ a well-known Viśiṣṭādvāita scholar, also points out the faulty logic of the advaitins. According to the Viśiṣṭādvaitins, the advaitin makes the mistake of interpreting nirguṇa texts in isolation, as the consequence of the two-fold distinction of Brahman, without considering other texts which describe Brahman as having several qualities. The advaitin's theory is that the texts which deny all qualities of Brahman are of greater validity than the saguna texts. But the Viśiṣṭādvaita seeks to disprove the arguments of the Advaita school and offers what is claimed to be a better solution to the problem. According to it, the negative texts will have to be

16

V. S. Ghatē, The Vedānta (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1960), p. 159. He remarks: "The sūtras lend no support to the two main points in Sankara's doctrine.... We arrive at the same conclusion on the point of the two-fold distinction of higher and lower Brahman. This two-fold distinction is, however, quite against the general spirit of the sūtras follows more positively from the manner of which the sūtrakāra defines the Brahman in I.1.2."

17

P. M. Modi, A Critique of the Brahma Sūtra, op. cit., p. 3.

18

P. N. Srinivasachari, The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1943), p. 117. "The theory of two Brahman involving the affirmation of saguna Brahman and its later denial is opposed to logic and life, as does not admit of ambiguity and compromise".

interpreted in accordance with the affirmative texts. Rāmānuja says that the implication of the negative texts is that Brahman is devoid of such inauspicious attributes as change, karma, etc.,¹⁹ but not that it is devoid of all characteristics. Similarly commenting on the 'neti, neti' declaration,²⁰ Rāmānuja argues that the passage is not intended to teach that Brahman has no qualities, but only that He is not regarded as limited to the qualities already enumerated; He is more than that.²¹ This conviction of Rāmānuja is very clear in his description of the innumerable qualities of Brahman.

The nature of the supreme Person is absolutely opposed to all limitations and imperfections. He is an ocean of auspicious qualities²² - unlimited, unsurpassed and immeasurable - which are appropriate to his nature.²³

Brahman: the possessor of qualities

The upaniṣadic text satyam, jñānam anantam Brahma (Taittiriya Upaniṣad, II.1) is interpreted in two different ways by the Vedānta

¹⁹ / - -
Sribhāṣya, I.i.1; Bhagavadgitabhāṣya, XIV.12.

²⁰
Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.iii.6, quoted in Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 38.

²¹
Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 38, and also Sribhāṣya, III.ii.22: "uttaram atha nāmadheyam satyasya satyam prāṇa vai satyam teṣāmeṣa satyamiti satyādi guṇa ganasya pratipāditatvāt pūrva prakṛtai tāvanmātram na bhavati brahmeti brahmaṇa etāvan mātrata pratisidhyata iti sūtrārtha".

²²
Udāra guṇa is synonymous with Kalyāṇa guṇa. The supreme person's six perfections are jñāna, śakti, bala, vīrya (dhairya), aiśvarya, and tejas. Rāmānuja does not explain himself on the relation of these guṇas mutually.

²³
Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 42: "svabhāvato malapratyāṅkātiśaya parimito udāra guṇa sāgaram nimeṣa-kastha kalamuhūrtādi parārdha paryantā parimita vyaccheda svarūpa sārvoṭ patti".

schools. The main issue is whether it declares the very svarūpa of Brahman or its characteristics. Śankara maintains the former; the Upaniṣadic text in question is understood to mean that Brahman is truth, knowledge, and infinite, and not that it (Brahman) is the possessor of these three characteristics. Rāmānuja controverts the above argument of Śankara and states that Brahman is qualified by truth, knowledge, and infinite. These are not independent substances, but properties. For, 'words which denote properties that describe the proper form of that entity itself by means of that attribute'.²⁴

Satyam

The definition of Brahman as satyam brings out its nature as the absolutely unconditioned reality and distinguishes it from the conditioned reals of cit and acit. Brahman is 'satyasya satya', as it is free from mutations of matter and contractions of Karma. Brahman is perfect and ultimately real as distinguished from the process of Prakṛti and the evolving individual self.

Jñānam

Śankara contends that difference is ultimately unreal; all things other than pure non-differenced consciousness are ultimately unreal. Hence Brahman, which is the non-differenced consciousness,

is identical with pure intelligence.²⁵ Such a view reduces the Supreme Person to bare quality-less thought which is the very antithesis of the compassionate Kṛṣṇa of the Bhagavadgīta or the God of Ālvārs. Rāmānuja, therefore, shows that the view of Brahman as pure thought (jñāna) is false. Those texts which refer to mere knowledge indeed declare that knowledge is the essential nature of Brahman, but this does not mean that mere knowledge constitutes the fundamental reality. For knowledge constitutes the essential nature of a knowing subject only, which is the substrate of knowledge, in the same way as the sun and the lamps are the substrate of light. So Rāmānuja argues that the Supreme Being may be conceived as Person, characterized by jñāna, as well as by several other attributes.²⁶

Anantam

According to Rāmānuja, Brahman has the remarkable character of infinity as a determinate quality, which distinguishes it from prakṛti and the finite self. Brahman is free from all the limitations

²⁵ Sribhāṣya, I.i.1: "tasmāt paramārthato nirasta-samasta bheda-vikalpa nirviśeṣa cinmātraikar sakūṭasthanitya samvideva bhrāntiyā jnatṛ jñeya jñāna rūpa vividha vicitra bhēda vivartata iti tanmūla-bhūta-vidyāni baharūaya nitya-suddha buddha mukta svabhāva brahmātmaikatva vidyā pratipattaya".

²⁶ Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 24: "svarūpa nirūpaṇa dharma śabdā hi dharma mukhena svarūpamapi pradipādayanti-tadāha sutrakāra-tadguṇa sārātṛtāt tad upadeśa prājñā-vat-Jñānena dharmeṇa svarūpam api nirūpitaṃ".

of space, time, and causality. The negative method of neti neti does not deny the finite, but denies the finitude of the infinite.

Anandam

If Brahman, as the advaitin maintains, is pure consciousness devoid of all characteristics, it cannot be regarded even as ānanda in the sense of the term.²⁷ Rāmānuja, therefore, remarks:

The (advaitin) interpretation of the text 'Bliss is Brahman (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, III.vi.1); the essential nature of Brahman is constituted by mere bliss is refuted by (saying) that jñāna constitutes the essential nature of Brahman. Brahman being the reality the substrate only of knowledge. Bliss is described as a favourable jñāna. It is said in such passages "special knowledge, bliss is Brahman". Therefore, it means the essential character of which is bliss - is Brahman.²⁸

Rāmānuja asserts that Brahman, while having knowledge for its essential nature, is at the same time a knowing subject. He quotes:

'That is one bliss of Brahman' (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, II.viii.1).

'He knowing the bliss of Brahman (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, II.iv.1).

Rāmānuja adds, 'the bliss of Brahman may be said to indicate His noble qualities, for the scripture has mentioned the relative bliss

27

If ānanda means that which induces an agreeable experience (anukūla vedanīyatvam), then Brahman would be knowable. This position is not agreeable to an advaitin. Nor can we understand by ānanda the negation of pain (dukha nivṛtti rūpatā), for Brahman in that case would not be positive. This is quite against the purport of the Upaniṣadic teaching.

28

Śrībhāṣya, I.i.1. (para. 51): "ānando brahma (Taitt., III.vi.1) iti ānandamātrameva brahma svarūpam prati-yate iti yaduktam, tad jñānaśrayasya brahmaṇo jñānam svarūpam, iti parihṛtam jñānamevaṅ anukūlam ānanda ityūcyate. 'vijñānam ānandam brahma' (Br., III.ix.28) iti ānanda svarūpam eva vijñānam brahma ityārtha. atha eva bhāvatā mekarasatā asya jñāna svarūpa syaiva jñātṛtvam api śrutisātaih".

enjoyed by souls in the different worlds; the highest bliss is said to be the bliss of Brahman; that is, the soul which realizes him finds Him to have blessed qualities which fulfil all its desires and thus produce in its supreme bliss.²⁹ Rāmanuja, after establishing his theory that satyam, jñānam, and ānandam are Brahman's essential qualities, cites numerous passages from the smṛtis in order to indicate that Brahman is the highest Person, characterized by the most blessed attributes and free from all evil qualities. Here is one from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa:

To that pure one, the great manifestation, the cause of all causes the highest Brahman to whom the word bhagavat is pronounced. The sound 'bha' associated with two meanings, the nourisher and sustainer, the sound 'ga', the leader, mover and creator. The two syllables 'bhaga' proclaim the six attributes, dominion, might, prowess, prosperity, wisdom, detachment. That in him - the universal self, the self of the beings - all beings dwell and that he dwells in all, this is the meaning in letter 'va', wisdom, might, strength, dominion, glory without any evil qualities, are all connoted by the word bhagavat. This way this great word bhagavat belongs to Vāsudeva who has become the highest Brahman and not going to (denote) another. This word which denotes persons worthy of reverence in general is used in its primary sense with reference to Vāsudeva only; in a derived sense with regard to other persons

(Viṣṇu Purāna, VI.v.72-75).³⁰

Therefore, on the basis of śruti texts and smṛti texts, Rāmānuja comes to the conclusion that all of these scripural passages describe the nature and the innumerable and infinite qualities of Brahman.³¹ It is futile and unreasonable, he thinks, to argue that the description of Brahman in the śruti texts as endowed with attributes refers only to an inferior Brahman as assumed by the Sankarites, because they do not mention any other kind of Brahman than the qualified one. Rāmānuja's metaphysics as an intellectual quest, defines satyam, jñānam, and anātman as the essential characteristics of Brahman.

The Advaita definition of tatāsta lakṣaṇa

From the pure absolutist standpoint, Sankara says, Brahman is the only Reality, and there is no creation at all. Brahman is the

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Sribhāṣya, I.i.1: "suddhe mahavibhūtyakhye pare brahmaṇi sabdayate maitreya bhagavacchabdaḥ sarva kārāṇa kārane. sambharteti tatha bhartā bhakāroartha dvayanvita netā gamayitā sṛṣṭa gākārārthas tatha mune. aiśvaryaśya samagrasya vīrasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ jñāna vairāgyayosvaiva saṅṅāṃ bhaga itīraṇā. vasanti tatra bhūtāni bhūtāt-manyakhilātmani sā ca bhūteṣva seṣeṣu vakārārtha stato avyayah. jñāna śakti balaiśvaryaavīrya tejāmsya seṣataḥ bhagavacchabda vācyāni vinā heyairguṇādibhiḥ. evameṣa mahāśabdō maitreya bhagavanīti paramabraham bhūtasya vāsudevasya nānyagaḥ."

31

Sribhāṣya, I.i.1 (para. 52): "ityādinā param braham svabhāvata eva nirastanikhiladoṣa gandham samastakalyāṇaguṇātmakam."

Absolute Reality, one without a second. The advaita of Sankara emphasizes the 'oneness of Brahman', the undivided Brahman, and declares that nothing apart from Brahman exists.³² In his Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, Sankara cites certain relevant texts which deny the existence of anything other than Brahman.

"He alone is below" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.25.1); "I alone am below", "Atma alone is below" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, II.4.6); "All this is Brahma", "The Atma is all this" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.25.2); "There is no diversity or many-ness here" (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.4.19); "Beyond whom nothing else is higher, i.e. transcendent", and "From whom nothing else is lower, i.e. smaller" (Śvetāśvetāra Upaniṣad, 3.9); "That this here is Brahma, without cause, without effect, without anything inside or outside [of it]" (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, II.5.19).³³

Brahman is so pure, so transcendent, that it cannot be considered as the cause of the world. That is, Brahman, defined as svarūpalakṣaṇa, is Brahman without a second, for which no dualities exist. There is no such thing as cause or effect. From the point of view of man in the phenomenal world, however, Brahman appears as the cause of the world. In the taṭastha³⁴ definition of Brahman, Brahman is the

³² / Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, III.ii.36, p. 664: "tathānya pratiṣedhādapi na brahmaṇaḥ paraṃ vastavantaramastīti gamyate."

³³ Ibid.: "sa evadhastāt (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.25.1), aham evadhastāt (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.25.2), sarvam tam parādadyo anyatrātmanaḥ sarvam veda (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, II.4.6), brahmaivedam sarvam ātmaivedam sarvam (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.25.2), neha nānāsti kimcana (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.4.19), yasmāt param na param asti kimcit (Śvetāśvetāra Upaniṣad, III.9)."

³⁴ Brahma Sūtra, I.1.2: 'janmādyasya yatah'.

cause of the entire world. It is through Brahman's association with its own power of māyā that Brahman becomes Īsvara; Brahman, in its aspect as Īsvara, is able to project the phenomenal world. Brahman as Īsvara or tatasthalakṣaṇa is both material and efficient cause of the world.

Brahman as the cause of the universe

As soon as Brahman is said to be the cause of the origin, subsistence, and reabsorption of the whole world, certain qualities are implied in Brahman being the cause of the world, such qualities as all-pervadingness, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, and beneficence. In other words, as soon as Brahman is acknowledged as the cause or ground of the world, all attributes required in the cause of the world, says Sankara, are seen to be present in Brahman.³⁵ With these words, Sankara attempts to overcome the apparent contradiction in the Upaniṣadic conception of Brahman, Brahman with attributes and Brahman transcending all attributes; for to speak of Brahman as the cause is also to speak of its attributes. Sankara is convinced that we must know Brahman with attributes before attaining knowledge of an attributless Brahman. For to know Brahman as destitute of qualities is to penetrate to the very depths of its nature; we must first know that of Brahman before knowing what it is in depth. Those passages in scripture which describe Brahman with attributes therefore do not, in Sankara's opinion, go against the unqualified character of Brahman. Sankara asserts the necessity for

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Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, op. cit., I.i.2, p. 47: "vastuvṛttamapi janmanā labdhasattā kasya dharmīṇaḥ sthitipralaya sambhavāt".

a dual description of Brahman; to know Brahman as tatasthalakṣaṇā (Brahman is described as all-knowing), as svarūpalakṣaṇa (Brahman is described in negative terms which imply that Brahman is beyond qualities), is relative to our states of ignorance and knowledge.³⁶ In the phenomenal context, we must speak of Brahman in empirical terms (i.e., as creator or governor of the universe). To speak of Brahman with qualities is to speak of Brahman as tatasthalakṣaṇā, which is, in fact, the first phase in the discovery of Brahman. The second stage of the knowing process is the discovery of Brahman as svarūpalakṣaṇa, here we know Brahman as absolutely devoid of qualities.

Śankara begins his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra with the consideration of the phenomenal world. "It is his conviction that our knowledge of Brahman must necessarily begin with the phenomenal world; Brahman knowledge is a process of progressive insight, or discovery, and this unmasking or uncovering process must start from phenomena".³⁷ In the phenomenal context, the question is raised as to the reality of the world. In our view, the world is real because we assume that what appears is real. Disillusioned with this definition of reality (what is real in the world), the seeker after Brahman

³⁶,
Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, I.i.5-11. See Radhakrishnan, The Brahma Sūtra, op. cit., pp. 255-56.

³⁷
See T. R. V. Murti, "The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita", K. C. Bhattacharya Memorial Volume (Amalner: Indian Institute of Philosophy, 1958), p. 137.

knowledge negates the world, and by cancelling the phenomenal world he discovers that the world is not its own ground, but rather that Brahman is the permanent and unchanging ground of the manifold world. It is tatasthalakṣaṇā which makes it known that the world is an unreal appearance of Brahman, and that Brahman is the ground or cause of illusion; the world is illusion in that it appears as real and is mistaken for reality. Tatasthalakṣaṇā tells us that this appearance of reality is false and temporary, it can be cancelled. There is, however, a permanent reality that can never be cancelled - Brahman.

Utilizing the rope-snake analogy, Sankara throws more light on Brahman as related to the world. The rope appears as the snake, and the snake is real temporarily; the fact that the snake, however, can be cancelled means that the snake has no permanent reality. With the negation of the snake, the rope previously hidden by the snake - appearance is seen as rope. The rope is never snake, even when it is mistaken for snake, the rope is always rope....it can never be cancelled.³⁸ Similarly, the world appears as real, but once negated the reality which is hidden by the appearance (the world) shines through and is completely open. When the snake is cancelled, Brahman still is. The world is real only for those who have not yet realized that Brahman is the sole reality. We know Brahman as the sole reality only when we negate the world - appearance which hides the real from our view. Dr. Murti points out the relation between the two definitions of Brahman:

³⁸,
Sankara, The Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā, op. cit., III 29, p. 186.

Starting from phenomena then, tatasthalakṣaṇa gives us the that of Brahman; it tells us that Brahman is the only reality, one without a second. With this knowledge, the Brahma-seeker may now penetrate deeper into the essence of Brahman. To know that Brahman is, is an indispensable step before knowing what it is; the svarūpa is our second and final stage in the discovery of Brahman.³⁹

It is Śankara's conviction then that reality is one and that unity, not diversity, is real. Thus in the advaita the world is seen as essentially non-different from the cause, because the effect previous to its actual beginning (had) its being in the cause.⁴⁰

Śankara describes the non-difference of the effect from the cause, he cites the Chāndogya Upaniṣad⁴¹ in order to demonstrate that there is no essential difference between Brahman and the world:

Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay.

For Śankara, this passage and others like it are refutations of all those passages in the Upaniṣads which declare the difference between Brahman and the world.⁴² From the above extract, Śankara contends that the apparent difference between Brahman and the world originates

39

T. R. V. Murti, op. cit., p. 138.

40

Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.i.16: "Itasea karanatva kārsya ananyatvam yat kāraṇam prāgutpatteḥ kāraṇātmanaiva karaṇo sattvamavarkālinasya kārsya śrūyate".

41

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.ii.1, and VI.i.4, quoted in Śankara's Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.1.17.

42

Śankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.i.17.

from speech, but in reality there exists no such thing as modification or difference, all difference is unreal.⁴³ The different names and forms we give to the world have a reality only as long as we continue to be caught up in the phenomenal world; once the effect or the world is cancelled or negated, multiplicity is negated, and reality is seen as one without a second. Brahman is the only reality. Thus Sankara maintains that the world and its individuals have no independent reality apart from Brahman. Brahman is non-differenced. Brahman is absolutely homogeneous, so that all difference and plurality are illusory. Commenting on a passage of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad,⁴⁴ Sankara remarks:

There is no difference whatsoever in Brahman, the object of the realization...really there is no duality apart from the superimposition of ignorance.⁴⁵

In the advaita, to say that Brahman is the cause of the world does not mean that Brahman undergoes any change. It never transforms itself into the effect, Brahman always remains the same reality.

43

Ibid., II.i.18: "tatredam śabda vācyasya kāryasya prāgutpatteḥ 'Sa' śabda vācyena karaṇena sāmānādhikaraṇasya śrūyamānatvāt satva anyatve prasidhyataḥ. yadi tu prāgutpattera satkāryam syātpascāccotpadya mānam karaṇe samaveyāttadānyat karaṇā tsyāt.

44

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.iv.19.

45

Sankara's Commentary on Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, trans. Swami Madhavānanda, op. cit., p. 744.

Sankara cites certain Upaniṣads⁴⁶ which emphasize the undivided and partless nature of Brahman. For Sankara, these passages indicate that the world is not a transformation of Brahman, but rather an appearance of Brahman.

The concept of māyā in Sankara's philosophy

Sankara introduces the concept of māyā as an inexplicable (anirvacanīya) principle responsible for world superimposition and its appearance without implying the fact of creation at all. Having begun with the conviction that Brahman is the one unqualified Reality whose very essence is consciousness, Sankara is faced with the world of day-to-day experience, which demands some explanation. He knows that it is obviously 'real' in some sense, but just how the reality of the world is to be conceived is his problem. Thus Sankara faces two seemingly incompatible points. On the one hand, he 'knows' that reality is Brahman. On the other, he 'knows' that he experiences a 'real' world. The epistemological point adopted by Sankara as a way out of this dilemma has important consequences for all of his thought. Sankara distinguishes between two orders of knowing, the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge. The lower wisdom is concerned with the phenomenal world. But the phenomenal order has only a provisional reality.⁴⁷ It is real when viewed from the perspective of lower

⁴⁶ Svetāśvetāra Upaniṣad, VI.xix.20: "Men shall roll up space (akāśa) as if it were a piece of hide, then there will be an end of misery without one's cultivating the knowledge of the Lord, who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, blameless, unattached, the supreme bridge to immortality, and like a fire that has consumed all its fuel. See also Mund. II.i.2.

⁴⁷ Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.i.14.

wisdom. But when one's perspective changes to that of the higher wisdom, one sees that the phenomenal world is, after all, only apparently real. It appears to be real and to be characterized by plurality and change - this is but an appearance, māyā.

Radhakrishnan⁴⁸ summarizes the sense in which the concept of māyā is to be found employed by Sankara in terms of six usages. Sankara does not always use the term with the same connotations, and distinguishing the subtle differences in meaning is sometimes a difficult task. But the six significations of māyā seem briefly to be the following:

(1) Māyā points to the 'unreal' appearance of the phenomenal world. This has been elaborated above. This world is not self-explanatory, it is not what it appears. The world appears to be made up of a multiplicity of phenomena which are in constant flux.

(2) Māyā refers to the incomprehensibility of the relationship between the one and the many; between the absolute and the world of becoming; between Brahman and the phenomenal world. This world is known through sense categories, but Brahman is known intuitively. 'We can never understand how the Ultimate Reality is related to the world of plurality. This incomprehensibility is brought out by the term māyā.'⁴⁹

(3) Māyā denotes the misleading 'effect' produced by Brahman. According to scripture, Brahman is the cause of the world. But Sankara says Brahman can be described as the cause of the world only in the same sense that a rope mistaken for a serpent can be described as the cause

48

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 573-74.

49

Ibid., p. 573.

of the serpent. The rope is not affected by the image of the serpent, nor is Brahman affected by the world. But as the serpent is the 'effect' of the rope, so is the world an effect of Brahman. This 'effect' has an illusory character and is described as māyā.

(4) Māyā describes the subjective delusion experienced by the observer of the 'objective', if misleading, 'effect' produced by Brahman. Māyā, then, is a subjective principle of illusion which accounts for the appearance of Brahman as the world.

(5) Īśvara has the power of self-expression, which is called māyā.

(6) Māyā is the sakti (power) through which the Supreme Person creates the world. But to say this is to speak from within the context of the phenomenal world, or, more exactly, it is to speak while still bound by avidyā. In the world of experience, reason, sense categories, space-time, and causality relationships are meaningful. Here plurality exists even in the world of persons. A Supreme Person, Īśvara, can be conceived as the highest Lord who is the empirical counterpart of the transcendental Brahman. The creative power of Īśvara, therefore, is called māyā.

Rāmanuja's concept of māyā

According to Sankara, māyā is not a metaphysical reality. On the contrary, the event of world creation, which to Rāmanuja is a metaphysical fact, happens at a time when the omniscient and omnipotent Nārāyaṇa has his every will realized and all his desires materialized decided, nonetheless, for the sake of his own sport' "I be many in the form of a world composed of an infinite variety of spiritual

beings and non-spiritual things".⁵⁰ Rāmānuja, therefore, does not feel compelled to deny plurality. In fact, he feels forced to champion it, and he does so by directly attacking the philosophical position of Sankara. Sankara maintains that māyā is responsible for the world which is recognized to be merely an 'appearance' when higher knowledge dawns. That is, vidyā destroys māyā. But Rāmānuja asserts that knowledge does not destroy a real thing,⁵¹ although it might alter our opinion about the real object. If māyā is unreal, there is nothing to be destroyed, and if knowledge destroys māyā it cannot be real. Since māyā is unreal, it will be incapable of functioning, and thus cannot be the sakti of God. Therefore, the entire creation is thrown into jeopardy.

According to Rāmānuja, māyā is but one part, and the real part of the real world, a world characterized by plurality. While describing the philosophy of creation, Rāmānuja shows that the relation between God and the world is similar to the relation between the soul and the body.⁵² According to Rāmānuja, a body is dependent for its existence upon its soul. All things and beings of the world have evolved out of the nature of God, they are guided and controlled by Him.

⁵⁰ Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.ii.3.

⁵¹ Srībhāṣya, I.i.1 (para. 57).

⁵² Ibid., II.i.9 (para. 255): "etaduktam bhavaticidacidvastu sarīrataya tadātmabhūtasya parasya brahmaṇaḥ. samkoca vikāśātmaka kārya kāraṇa bhāvavasthadvayānvye api na kascid virodhaḥ. yataḥ samkoca vikāśau parabrahmasarīrabhūta cidacid vastugatau".

Rāmānuja established the non-duality of Ultimate Reality by arguing that the conscious beings and the unconscious elements are modes of God,⁵³ but he makes it clear that the individual souls, matter, and God have their own peculiar qualities by virtue of which they remain distinct from one another. Brahman is the metaphysical ground of the world of cit and acit, the Inner Ruler of the finite self and the goal of life. So the world is not an illusion; on the contrary, Rāmānuja has derived the character of the world from the reality of the material cause. Māyā is used to refer definitely to the real objects.⁵⁴ Rāmānuja quotes a passage from Viṣṇu Purāna in order to show that māyā has a positive meaning:

By that quickly moving (discuss of the Lord) protecting the body of the child, was destroyed that thousand māyās of Sambara, with its each individual portion.

(Viṣṇu Purāna I.19-20)⁵⁵

Rāmānuja, therefore, maintains that the term māyā denotes the nature of a creator of varied objects in the case of prakṛti. The nature of māyin is spoken of in respect of the highest Puruṣa, simply on account of his being possessed of that māyā and not as being ignorant.⁵⁶

53

Ibid., I.i.1 (para. 75): "evam devamanuṣyādi pinda viśiṣṭānām jīvanam paramātma śarīratayā tatprakāratva jīvatmavācīnaḥ śabdaḥ paramātma paryantāḥ." Also see, Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 75: "tasmād īśvara prakāra bhūta sarva avastha prakṛti puruṣa vacīnaḥ."

54

Ibid., I.i.1 (para. 68): "māyā śabdenābhīdhānāt anirvacanīyatvammāyā śabdasya anirvacanīyavācītvam na dṛṣṭam...māyā śabdasya mithyā-paryāyatvenānirvacanīyatvam tadāpi nāsti, na hi sarvatra, māyā śabdo mithyā viśayaḥ."

55

Ibid.

56

Rāmānuja quotes Śvetāśvetāra Upaniṣad, IV.9 in support of his interpretation of māyā. See Sribhāṣya, I.i.1 (para. 68).

Evolution of the world

Rāmānuja, commenting on the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.ii.1, points out that even before creation the world was real.⁵⁷ Uddālaka explains sadvidya to his son Svetaketu. He expounds the omniscient and omnipotent Brahman as the cause of the universe. He says: "sad eva somyedam agra āsid ekam eva advītiyam". Rāmānuja takes up this statement and explains it in the following manner: here the word 'idam' denotes the world, 'agra' means the time before creation, and with 'sad eva' it is declared that during that time before creation the world was essentially sat.⁵⁸ But Rāmānuja is aware of the fact that the śruti declare the world as asat before the creation. Asat here really means unsuitability for bearing names and forms due to extreme subtlety.⁵⁹ In other words, the purport of the text, according to Rāmānuja, is that at the very time of its creation the world was still non-differentiated, into name and form (nāma and rūpa). It is made

57

Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 22: "sarvasya brahmakāryatva pratipādenena tadātmakatayaiva satyatvam na anyatheti tat satyam ityuktam. yatha dr̥ṣṭānte sarvasya mṛdvikārasya mṛdātmanaiva satyatvam."

58

Ibid., para. 16: "tataḥ sarvajñam sarva śakti brahmaiva sarva kāraṇam ityupadiśan sa hovāca sadeva somyedam agra āsid ekam eva advītiyamiti agredam iti jagad nirdiṣṭam. agra iti ca sṛṣṭeḥ pūrvakālaḥ tasmin kāle jagataḥ sadātmakataṁ sadev pratipādyā. Also see, ibid., para. 33.

59

Sribhāṣya, I.i.18, para. 258: "idam śabda nirdiṣṭasya jagataḥ sattiva dharmā nāma rūpe. asatva dharmasta tad virodhiṁ sūkṣmāvasthā. ataḥ jagato nāma rūpa yuktasya tad virodhi sūkṣma daśāpatti asattvam."

clear in the same exposition that sat is the material cause of the world; the word advitīyam denies that there was still another cause, or an operative cause, different from that material cause.⁶⁰ P. N. Srinivāsacari explains the relation between cause and effect, thus expressing Rāmānuja's view:

The sadvidyā, according to Rāmānuja, brings out the non-difference in the relation between cause and effect as applied to cosmology. The sat enters into different states without losing its substantiality. The sat in pralaya is homogeneous without any distinction of nāma and rupa and the same sat in sr̥ṣṭi differentiates itself and evolves into heterogeneity of names and forms and becomes their inner self.⁶¹

Prakṛti and ātman are animated, pervaded, and supported by God, who is immanent in as much as he is the "Inner Ruler" of Prakṛti and the ātman, but transcendent in as much as he is entirely self-sufficient and does not depend on them in any way.

In explaining the reality of the world, however, Rāmānuja becomes involved in a major problem that Sankara had avoided through his doctrine of māyā. It is the problem of evil. If the reality of the world derives from God, He must be responsible for the evil as well as the good. Rāmānuja elaborates a number of arguments to meet this

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Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 33: "anyatropadāna kāraṇasya sva vyatiriktādhiṣṭāprapekṣā darśano api sarva vilakṣaṇatvād asya sarvajñasya brahmaṇaḥ sarva-śakti-yogo na viruddha ityadvitīya padamadhiṣṭatrantaram nivārayati."

61

P. N. Srinivasacari, The Philosophy of Visistadvaita, p. 259.

challenge. In effect, they say that:

(1) each substance in the composite being of Brahman retains its distinctive nature;⁶²

(2) the self ensouling a body is unaffected by the imperfections of the body;⁶³

(3) Brahman, the Supreme Self, is not subject to karma and not the cause of evil, but he is its Lord.

Manifestations of the Supreme Person

The Supreme Person manifests himself in various ways to help his devotees. Para, vyūha, vibhāva (avatāra), antaryāmin, and arca are not emanational categories, but concrete expressions of divine grace.

Para: the transcendental, changeless, formless, and eternal being which satisfies the meditational needs of the mumuksū is para.

Yatīndramatadīpikā defines the para as follows:

What is called para is Nārāyaṇa, who is expressed by such terms as Parabrahman, Paravāsudeva, who is qualified by the infinite, auspicious attributes such as knowledge, power, etc.; whose (presence) is being enjoyed by the eternalś....who is the possessor of divine, auspicious figure, who is four-armed, who is accompanied by Srī, Bhū and Līlā, who is equipped with the divine weapons such as conch, discus, etc.....who is seated on seṣa.⁶⁴

⁶² Sribhāṣya, II.i.14, para. 261: "syād eva vibhāgo jīva īśvara svabhāvayoḥ."

⁶³ Ibid., II.i.9, para. 255: "śarīra gata astu doṣā na ātmani prasajyante, atmagaatās ca guṇa na śarīre." See also, ibid., II.i.14, para. 261.

⁶⁴ Srīnivāsadāsa, Yatīndramatadīpikā, op. cit., IX.18, p. 134.

Vyūha: The Supreme Person, with his infinite cosmic will, manifests himself in different ways to carry on successfully the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the Universe. The four-fold forms of Vyūha, Vāsudeva, Samkarsana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, rule over the entire realm of cit and acit. P. N. Srinivasacari interprets the role of the vyūha in a theological fashion. He writes:

In the history of the adventure of souls occur certain epochs of moral crisis, when egoism becomes so inflated and sinfulness becomes so iniquitous that īśvara in his infinite mercy withdraws the instruments of evil and thus asserts the wrongdoers from their career of crime and sin. This is called 'pralaya' and has a soothing effect on the self. Srṣṭi is also a redemptive process and after the refreshment of pralaya, the jīva wakes up to moral activity and enters on a new life, and is given a fresh opportunity for attaining freedom.⁶⁵

Vāsudeva possesses six qualities, and they are distributed equally among the other personalities of the vyūha. Though each vyūha is the manifestation of the highest divine, qualified by all the six guṇas, it, however, is characterized by two predominant guṇas.⁶⁶ Thus Samkarsana is filled with knowledge and strength. Pradyumna possessed in the highest degree lordship and virility. Aniruddha has consummated potency and splendour.⁶⁷ Dr. Otto Schrader points out that the word is a combination of the root 'uh' (to shove) and the preposition 'vi' (asunder), meaning 'to shove asunder' the six guṇas into three pairs.⁶⁸ The theory of vyūha, which is one of the foundational

⁶⁵ P. N. Srinivasacari, The Philosophy of Viśistādvaita, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Śrībhāṣya, II.2.42.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Otto Schrader, Introduction to the Pañcarātra, p. 35.

doctrines of Pañcarātra, forms part and parcel of the Viśiṣṭādvaita conception of Deity. Saṅkarṣaṇa emanates from Vāsudeva, Pradyumna from Saṅkarṣaṇa, and Aniruddha from Pradyumna. In the language of the Pañcarātra, the manifestation is like 'one flame proceeding from another flame'.⁶⁹

Rāmānuja informs us of another aspect of vyūha, referred to in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata. In this alternative view, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha are the beings ruling over the soul, mind, and ego; consequently, Saṅkarṣaṇa is denoted by jīva (soul), Pradyumna by manas (mind), and Aniruddha by aḥamkara (ego).⁷⁰

Antaryāmin: The immanence of Brahman within all beings as their "Inner Ruler" without being affected by their evils is another concrete example of Īśvara's grace (krpā). Rāmānuja cites⁷¹ numerous śruti texts, as well as smṛti passages, in order to point out that the Supreme Brahman is the soul of all, and all entities, spiritual and non-spiritual, constitute his body. In other words, the organic

69

Ibid.

70

Śrībhāṣya, II.ii.41: "tatra jīva mano aḥmākāra tatvānām adhis-tātārah saṅkarṣaṇa Pradyumna aniruddha iti teṣameva jīvādi śabdair abhidhānam viruddham.

71

Vedārthasaṅgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, op. cit., para. 65, pp. 228-29.

"He is the soul, the immortal Inner Ruler" (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, III.vii.3; III.vii.22).

"He is the one, who is the immanent soul of all beings" (Subala Upaniṣad, 7). "The commander of men, who has entered within them, the soul of all" (Taittirīya Āra., III.ii). "After having created it, He entered into it" (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, II.6). "By the way of this living soul" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.iii.2). "Whatsoever is created by all living creatures in the production of all that can be created, O Brahman, that all is verily Hari's body" (Viṣṇu Purāṇa, I-xxii.38). "I am the soul, O Guḍakeśa, that is the resting place of all beings" (Bhagavadgītā, X.20).

unity is made possible by the principle of controlling indwellingness or pervasive power of God involving a capacity to actually indwell in each in certain ways such as have been asserted by the antaryāmin doctrine of the Vedānta.⁷²

It has been declared that the Supreme Person is the "Inner Ruler" of all creatures, but it does not mean that the individual soul has no freedom of action. Rāmānuja's theological system could solve the problem of the divine action in the soul and the personal freedom without sacrificing either emphasis. This sophisticated interpretation of Rāmānuja will be discussed later.⁷³

Avatāra: Rāmānuja indicates that God comes down to this empirical world of suffering mainly due to his compassion towards his devotees. The Bhagavadgītābhāṣya⁷⁴ clearly states the purpose of God's avatāras: "As they will become weak and unnerved in every limb (on account of separation from Me) I am born from age to age in the form of gods, men, etc., for protecting them by giving them opportunities of seeking, talking about and doing similar things in regard to my body and activities".⁷⁵ God takes the body of his own accord⁷⁶ because there

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Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 66.

73

See Chapter III.

74

Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, IV.8.

75

Rāmānuja, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, trans. M. R. Sampatkumaran (Madras: Prof. M. Rangacharya Memorial Trust, 1959), pp. 117-18. Also see, Śrībhāṣya, I.i.21.

76

Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, IV.7.

is no other powerful force to compel him to do so. This shows the concern of the Lord for his devotees. God, out of his immeasurable grace, makes himself available to his devotees through the five types of manifestations as described above. Rāmanuja is never tired of describing the different good qualities of Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is the soul of the entire creation. His generosity and favour towards his devotees is unfathomable. It is immeasurably great, and it is incomprehensible how God could give as though he were ignorant of the unworthiness and insignificance of the recipients. Along the same lines is one of their definitions of the term kṛtajnata as Rāmanuja applies it to God. This is usually translated as 'gratitude', its literal meaning being "the recognition of something done".

In the case of the category of gāmbhīrya, we may detect in the definitions something of the tendency of the later Śrī Vaiṣṇavas to interpret all divine qualities originally indicative of God's supremacy so that they also will point to his accessibility. Rāmanuja himself does not define gāmbhīrya, so we do not know for sure whether it was its original meaning of 'depth' or 'profundity' which caused him to use it so frequently as a divine attribute, or whether it was some derived meaning which was most important for him, such as 'inscrutability' or 'majesty'. For many of the divine attributes, the commentators give various alternative meanings, and it is quite understandable that Rāmanuja also has given somewhat different meanings to the same term in different contexts. What is more important for us to note, however, is that the concept of generosity itself implies a combination of supremacy and accessibility. This quality is one which

finds its clearest expression in someone with the resources to bestow gifts: the king or the great landowner, for whom Rāmaṇuja frequently furnishes the human analogy for the position of the Supreme Person. It is especially lavish generosity which Rāmaṇuja seems to have in mind, that is a royal prerogative. Although the presupposition of this generosity is wealth or greatness, the most prominent feature of the definition is the self-forgetfulness of the giver motivated by his desire to give.'

This notion of self-forgetfulness is even more prominent in the later commentators' definitions of sausīlya, another important divine attribute which Rāmaṇuja frequently mentions but never defines. This term has the common meaning of 'good conduct', as does the simpler form sīla, but at some point it acquired a much more specific meaning in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Like aūdārya, sausīlya can only be exercised by one who is essentially superior. That is why we may properly translate this concept by the English word 'condescension', but we must qualify this as 'gracious condescension', not only because of the unfavourable associations of the noun by itself, but because of unfavourable connotations of 'condescension' inherent in the situation of a superior dealing with an inferior, unless the conduct of the superior is so gracious that his inferiors are not frightened or embarrassed, but are rather so charmed by his gracious presence that they temporarily forget his superiority. This quality is not real, but only 'as it were' (expressed by 'iva' in Sanskrit), yet it is essential to the situation of intimate communion between the Lord and his servants.

It is the attitude and the behavior of God as avatāra that furnishes the background for the understanding of all these qualities indicating the divine saulabhya, and it is from the lives of the avatāras that illustrations of a particular quality are often drawn by the commentators. It is the present situation of the serious worshipper, however, that furnishes the most important context for Rāmanuja's thought about these qualities, as well as for that of his followers. Rāmanuja was concerned about the present communion of the devotee with the Supreme Lord, and it is about that communion that he is thinking when he says that the Lord treats his chosen devotees as his equals, or even as though they were superior to him. The possibility of such an ontologically impossible situation arises from the 'gracious condescension' of the Lord.

The other important divine attribute which underlies this paradoxical relation is vatsalya, which may perhaps be best translated in the Śri Vaiṣṇava usage as 'protecting and forgiving love'. The earlier meaning of the word was the relation between the mother cow and its calf, and the common meaning was 'tender affection' or love.

As in the case of the two attributes just discussed, a kind of divine self-forgetfulness is implied in this conception of vatsalya, a fact obscured by the later controversy. There is something even more important here than the ignoring of the sin of the creature, there is the forgetting of the sinless perfection of the creator and judge, the doctrine dearest to Rāmanuja's heart. It might be argued, on the basis of Rāmanuja's definition of 'mercy' (dayā), that he would not have accepted either of the later definitions of the schools.

In that case, Rāmānuja would have understood vātsalya along the lines of the later definition of mārdava: 'inner softness', 'inability to bear separation from his devotees'. Once we recognize the longing for communion with his devotees as an attribute of the divine nature, however, the essential problem returns. Why should God desire, let alone yearn for, fellowship with sinful creatures? It can only be because of a fundamental impulsion in the divine nature, a quality which at times takes precedence over everything else in God's Being. This is not a general setting aside of divine justice. Because of his supreme compassion, God has established himself (through his incarnations and other manifestations) as a refuge for all, but his vātsalya is expressed only towards those who have taken refuge (āśrita) in him. For those, however, and more especially for the few who have shown their worthiness for his special favour, God is an "ocean of vātsalya", and Rāmānuja almost certainly understood this protecting love to include "forgiveness to the maximum extent". The result of that contact in intimate communion is the destruction or the burning away of sin, so that the devotee can look forward to liberation from this sinful world and eternal communion with his Lord; but that cleansing action is only possible because the Lord, free from the slightest trace of anything defiling, so yearns for communion with his creatures that he disregards their sinful state. This is what Rāmānuja expresses with the last of the four phrases at the end of the introduction to the Gītābhāṣya, āśrita-vātsalya-vivaśaḥ, "overwhelmed by his love for his sinful creatures who have come to him for refuge".

The quality of compassion seems to have less relevance to this intimate sphere of God's communion with his devotee, yet that general concern for the happiness of creatures and distress at their misery is the basic for these more specific and dramatic divine qualities. In the definition of 'mercy' or 'compassion' too, there is a divine self-forgetfulness: the forgetting of his own interest or gain (svārthanirapekṣa), the forgetting of his eternal delights and his cosmic sports in his compassionate concern for his finite creatures.

CHAPTER III

THE STATUS OF THE FINITE SELF

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Ramanuja finds that the chief obstacle to the religious view of the relation between Brahman and the soul is the advaitin's doctrine that the individual soul (jīva) is in reality identical with Brahman. Does the Upaniṣadic phrase, "That thou art" (Tattvamasi) plainly maintain that there is no difference between Brahman and the individual soul? Are the individual soul and Brahman absolutely one? These are Rāmanuja's questions.

Sankara contends that the difference between the two is only real when we remain in the condition of ignorance.¹ When knowledge arises, the difference is no more real. When we know Brahman as absolutely transcendent, we know ourselves in depth; to know Brahman is to realize our deeper self. Thus the individual soul is one with Brahman. Rāmanuja and his followers were ardent supporters of the reality of the individual souls and their distinctness from Brahman in opposition to the advaitic conception of oneness.² The jīva is

¹ /
Sankara, Commentary on Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, op. cit., p. 368: "...this great reality called the Supreme Self, from which you have been cut off by ignorance as a separate entity, through your connection with the limiting adjuncts of the body and organs, and have become mortal, subject to birth and death, hunger and thirst and other such relative attributes.

²
Kalidasa Bhattacharya, "The Status of the Individual Soul", Philosophy East and West, XIV (1964), pp. 137-38.

not only different from Īśvara, but is also different from the other jīvas. Rāmānuja's statement is based on a passage of the Bhagavadgīta which runs as follows:

God declares "I, the Lord, have always existed and will always exist and likewise the individual ātmans, Arjuna and all others, who are subject to my Lordship, have always existed and always exist. No doubt can be entertained that I who am the Lord, the Supreme Ātman am immortal; likewise Arjuna and all others, though being mere kṣetrajñā nothing but ātmans should be considered immortal."³

On the basis of this scriptural authority, Rāmānuja says, "We have to admit (1) that there is difference between God and the individual ātmans; (2) that there is difference between the individual ātmans themselves; and (3) that this difference is absolutely real".⁴

Rāmānuja points out numerous defects in Sankara's view regarding the soul's relation to Brahman. According to Sankara, the many individual souls are reflections of the one Brahman, and their difference is mainly due to the different limiting adjuncts (upādhi).⁵ "It is Brahman alone that is real; the distinction of a plurality of souls is due to faulty imagination and hence unreal".⁶

3

Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgīta, p. 50. See Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, II.12: "yatha aham sarveśvaraḥ paramātmā nitya iti na athra samśayaḥ, yatheva bhavantaḥ kṣetrajñā ātmānah api nityā eva iti mantavyāḥ."

4

Van Buitenen, op. cit., p. 50.

5

Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.3.50: "ābhāsa eva caiṣa jīvaḥ parasyātmāno jala sūryakādivatpratipattavyaḥ. na sa eva sākṣāt. nāpi vastavantaram atasca yathā naikasmin jala-sūryake kampamāne jala-sūrya-kāntaram kampate, evam naikasmin jīve karma phala sambandhini jīvāntarasya tatsambandhaḥ."

6

Srībhāṣya, I.i.1. Here Rāmānuja summarizes the position of Sankara.

Rāmānuja, in this connection, would like to put a question: "To whom then does that imagination belong? Not to Brahman, because Brahman's nature consists of pure consciousness without any imaginary thoughts. Nor again to the jīvas, for this would imply an undesirable contingency of mutual dependence, the existence of jīva is dependent on imagination and that imagination resides in the jīva."⁷

This shows the inherent incompatibility of the Sankarite argument that, on the one hand, he conceives ignorance to be the cause of the soul, and on the other posits that the ignorance in itself is caused by the soul. To this the advaitin would reply that "the ignorance and the existence of the souls form an endless retrogressive chain; their relation is like that of the seed and the sprout".⁸ But Rāmānuja points out the weakness of the advaitin argument by saying that if the ignorance abides in the soul, it must abide either in the soul's essential form or in its fictitiously imagined form. The first alternative is not possible because the advaitin regards the essential form of the soul as Brahman himself, and ignorance, which is contradictory to Brahman, cannot be ascribed to him. The second alternative cannot be accepted because the advaitin holds that only ignorance exists besides Brahman. So the fictitiously imagined form

⁷ Srībhāṣya, II.i.15: "kasya punaḥ kalpana? na tāvad brahmaṇaḥ tasya parisuddha jñānātmanaḥ kalpana sunyatvāt. nāpi jīvanām iteretara āśrayatva prasāṅgāt. kalpanādhino hi jīva bhāva: jīvaśrayā ca kalpanā."

⁸ Ibid., Rāmānuja cites the answer of the advaitin: "avidyā jīvabhāvayorbijānkura nyāyenā nānāditvāt."

of the soul must itself be nothing else but ignorance; and this being so, to ascribe ignorance to the soul in its fictitiously imagined form is to ascribe ignorance to ignorance and this explains nothing. Rāmānuja considers a third alternative, namely that ignorance abides in the essential nature of the soul qualified by its fictitiously imagined aspect. But if the soul's essential nature is qualified, it can, according to the advaitin, be qualified only by ignorance, and if it is qualified by ignorance, trying to explain it by ascribing ignorance to what is already qualified by it does not take us any further.⁹ Moreover, Rāmānuja indicates that unless the difference of the individual self is admitted to be real, the distinction between bondage and release cannot be accounted for. He remarks:

For if by release is understood the destruction of avidyā, in that case when one soul attains release so others also would be released - but avidyā persists owing to others not being released, then even that one soul is not released on account of avidyā not being destroyed. But we assume a different avidyā for every soul, that soul, in whose case avidyā is destroyed would be released, and that whose avidyā is not destroyed will remain in bondage. You speak of pratijīva depending on the difference of jīva. What about that difference? Is that natural or superimposed by avidyā?¹⁰

⁹ Srībhāṣya, II.i.15: "jīvasya akalpita svabhāvika rūpeṇa vidyāśrayatve brahmaṇa evā vidyāśrayatvamuktam syāt tadatiriktēna tasmin kalpitena akāraṇa avidyāśrayatve jaḍasya vidyāśrayatvamuktam syāt. na khalu advaitavādin stadubhaya vyatiriktamākāramabhyupagacchanti. kalpitākāra viśeṣṭena svarūpeṇaiva avidyāśrayatvamiti cet.

¹⁰ Ibid.: "avidyā vināśa eva hi mokṣa tatra ekasmin mukte avidyā vināśāt itere api vimucyeren anyasya amuktāt avidyā tiṣṭhati iti cet, tarhi ekasyāpyamuktiḥ syāt, avidyāyā avinaṣṭatvāt. pratijīva avidyā bheda kalpyate, tatra yasya avidyā vinaṣṭa sa mokṣyate, yasya tvanaṣṭa sa bhantasyate iti cet tanna pratijīvamiti jīva bhedamaśritya brūṣe, sa jīva bheda kim svabhāvikata avidyā kalpitaḥ."

The Advaita arguments of avidyā and its locus have been analyzed by Rāmānuja. The advaitin is again questioned by Rāmānuja:

When avidyā abiding in the individual soul is destroyed through the rise of knowledge of truth, does then the soul perish or not? If the soul were to perish then liberation is nothing but the destruction of the essential nature of the soul. If not there would be the absence of liberation even on the destruction of avidyā, since it continues to exist as soul different from Brahman.¹¹

But even if the diversity of jīvas is accepted as imagination (kalpanīka), one may ask to whom does this diversifying kalpana (i.e., avidyā) belong? Not to avidyā, because it is not an intelligent principle; not to jīvas, because owing their very existence to kalpana, how can they be the locus of their own cause?¹² Śankara does not always care to maintain a clear line of distinction between the conceptions of avidyā and māyā, he, nevertheless, conceives of the cause of saṁsāra, with all its pains and sorrows, as avidyā when considered in the context of jīva, and as māyā when viewed in relation with Brahman. The fluid position of the conception of avidyā, now identified with māyā, is all the more clear when treated as separate in one and the same passage.¹³ Avidyā is explained both as prakṛti and the state of mis-identification with prakṛti on the part of the puruṣa. But some of the post-Śankarite advaitins carefully distinguished māyā and avidyā in order to overcome

11/ Śrībhāṣya, II.i.15: "kim ca jīvasrayāyā avidyāyāstattva-jnānodayāt, nāso sati jīvo nāsyet va na va? yadi nāsyet svarūpocchittilakṣaṇo mokṣaḥ syāt. no cet avidyā nāso api anirmokṣaḥ brahmasvarūpa vyatirikta jīvatvāvasthānāt.

12

Ibid.

13/

Śankara, Commentary on the Bhagavadgīta, XIII.21.

the defect involved in the view that Brahman is the locus of ajñāna. Rāmānuja dismisses the view by showing that such a distinction between avidyā and māyā will not improve the situation.

For even if Brahman possesses māyā, i.e. illusive power, it cannot without nescience, be conscious of souls. And without being conscious of others the Lord of māyā itself cannot bring about the consciousness of others on the part of its Lord, for it is a mere means to delude others, after they have become objects of consciousness. But if māyā causes Brahman....to become conscious of other beings, then māyā is nothing but another name for nescience....Moreover, if Brahman recognizes all beings apart from himself as false, he does not delude them; for surely none but a mad man would aim at deluding beings known by him to be unreal.¹⁴

Rāmānuja, therefore, urges that from whatever point of view the theory (i.e., the souls are related to Brahman but seemingly different, the illusion regarding their reality as individual existences being due to the limiting adjuncts produced by māyā or avidyā with which the unitary Brahman is associated) is subjected to logical examination, it is found to be riddled with contradictions.

Rāmānuja describes the difference of the individual souls from Brahman thus:

¹⁴ Sribhāṣya, II.1.15, trans. George Thibaut, op. cit., p. 441: "ajñānam antareṇa hi māyino api brahmaṇo jīvadarsatvam na syat. naca māyāvī parān dr̥ṣṭvā mohayitumalam nāpi māyā māyāvino darśanasādhanam dr̥ṣṭeṣu pareṣu tanmohanasādhanamātratvāt tasya. atha brahmaṇo māyā tasya jīva darsatvam kurvati. jīvamohanasya heturitimanyase; tarhi parisuddhasyā-khandaikarāṣa svaprakāśasya brahmaṇaḥ paradarśanam kurvati māyā māyāparaparyāya avidyaiva syāt."

The Highest Brahman denoted by the term Being is the cause of all, free from all imperfection, with innumerable and infinite auspicious qualities, resolved to be many. Thereupon created the entire world, light, water, earth and, above all, sent forth the whole mass of jīvas into different bodies, divine and human, etc., in conformity with their deeds. Finally, the being itself entered into the jīvas as their inner soul and consequently they become his body.¹⁵

Rāmānuja holds the theory of antaryamin, as we discussed in the previous chapter, but Brahman, the inner self of jīva, is not identical with jīva. Rāmānuja, moreover, remarks that soul and matter are inter-related eternally in interaction. Though the soul may be free from matter, it is still potentially vulnerable to it. The union of soul and body is, no doubt, brought about by a deception. The soul mistakes itself for a material ego. From the soul's point of view, the union is a deficiency, but from the ego's point of view, the union is a harmony. The body obeys the soul to fulfil its purpose for the body is entirely dependent on the soul for its very existence.¹⁶

Rāmānuja defines jīva as follows:

The proper form of the soul is free from all various differentiations consisting in the distinctions that are brought about by the natural evolution (parināma) of Prakṛti into the bodies of gods, men, etc. In essence,

15

Ibid., I.1.13: "nirasta nikhila doṣa gandhaṃ satya samkalpat-vamiśraṇavadhikātiśayāsamkheya kalyāṇa guṇagaṇam samasta-kāraṇa bhūtam param brahma bahu syām (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.2.3). jīvena mayeti nirdeśo jīvasya brahmātmakatvam darśayati. brahmātmakatvam ca jivasya jīvantarātmatayā brahmaṇo anupraveśat iti avagamyate."

16

Rāmānuja, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, II.13-14.

it is only characterized by knowledge and beatitude. When these differentiations of god, men, etc., - which have been brought about by the Karman of the soul - have vanished there persists a differentiation in its proper form; it is beyond the power of expression and can only be known by the soul itself. So the soul can only be defined as essentially knowledge, and this essential nature is common to all souls.¹⁷

Here it is to be borne in mind that the two essential attributes of the Jīvatman, viz., consciousness and bliss (jñāna and ānanda) follow the pattern of strict individuality in as much as they belong to the jīva. In discussing the Brahma Sūtra II.3.19, Rāmānuja states that the essential nature of the soul is to be a knowing subject. Rāmānuja uses the following Upaniṣadic passages in support of his view. "He who knows, let me smell this, he is the self, etc."¹⁸ "He who is within the heart, surrounded by the prānas, the person of light consisting of knowledge."¹⁹ Rāmānuja makes it very clear that the self is not mere knowledge, but an individual who has knowledge as his essential characteristic. He emphasizes the individuality of the soul as against the advaitic position prevalent hitherto in Vedāntic circles, to overlook all distinctions between the finite self and Brahman.

17

Vedārthasamgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, para. 5, p. 186:
 "jīvatmanah svarūpam deva manuṣyādi prakṛti pariṇāma viśeṣa rūpa
 nānāvidha bheda rahitaṃ jñānānanda guṇam, tasyaitasya karmakṛta
 devādi bhede apadhvaste svarūpa bhedo vācamagocaraḥ svasamvedyaḥ
 jñāna svarūpa mityetāvadeva nirdeśyam. tacca sarveṣāmātmanam
 samānam."

18

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.xii.4.

19

Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, IV.v.15.

Sankara, in his commentaries, repeatedly asserts that ātman is neither a doer nor an enjoyer. These concepts, according to Sankara, are associated with it on account of the superimposition of the intellect (buddhi) to which they really belong.²⁰ Insofar as the ātman is related to phenomena or is an empirical self, the concepts of agency in action and enjoyment have meaning. But when we consider this problem from the transcendental standpoint, Sankara would not agree to accord any justification to the attribution of such ideas with a principle which, in its nature, is pure, eternal, and immutable.

This denial of the agency in ātman is opposed to Rāmānuja's conception of ātman as the doer and enjoyer. According to Rāmānuja, the agency of ātman is essential for upholding the utility and purport of scriptures without which all their injunctions would become meaningless. If a man is, in reality, not the agent of an act, it would be nonsensical for the Vedas to preach the performance of oblations and other rituals for achieving apavarga. So Rāmānuja remarks:

The jīva is only an agent, not the guṇas, because then only scripture has a meaning. For scriptural injunctions, such as he who desires the heaven has to perform sacrifice, he who desires liberation has to meditate on Brahman and similar ones, enjoin action on him only who will enjoy the fruit of the action - whether the heaven or liberation or anything else. If these injunctions were only meant for non-sentient beings then they (injunctions) would not have given to another. The commandments of the scripture are the commandments for action.

20,

Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.iii.49: "nhi kartur bhoktur ca ātmanaḥ saṁtataḥ sarvaiḥ sarīraiḥ sambandho asti. upādhitantro hi jīva ityuktam."

Scripture, therefore, has sense only if we admit that none but the intelligent enjoyer of the fruit of the action is at the same time the agent.²¹

Rāmānuja thinks that it is a necessary presupposition of ethical philosophy imparting instructions about the means of liberation that the subject is a real entity and not a false appearance as advocated in Advaita Vedānta.

The relation between Paramātman and Jīvātman

Sankara has discussed this problem in detail in his Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra²² and has concluded that the only satisfactory relation that can be conceived between Paramātman and Jīvātman is one of the whole (amsi) and the part (amsa), on the analogy of the spark and fire. Sankara consciously asserts²³ that the articulation of this relation is only from a vyāvahārika point of view and not from the absolute standpoint. The expression of this relation is, however, only figurative and intends to accord no primary meaning. But he could completely denounce, on grounds of ethical considerations, the philosophy of God as the ruler and the master of the soul. In his

21

Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmānuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, pp. 553-54: "atmaiva kartā; na guṇāḥ kasmāt śāstrārthvattvāt śāstrāṇi hi yajeta svargakāmaḥ mumukṣu brahmopāsīte; ityevamādini svargamokṣādīphalasya bhoktareveva kṛtutve niyujyate; nahya cetanasya kṛtutve anye niyujyate. śāsanācca śāstram śāsanam ca pravartanam, ...ataḥ śāstrānām arthavattvam bhoktuścetasvaiva kṛtutve bhavet." (Sribhāṣya, II.iii.33).

22

Sankara, Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, II.iii.42: "ato bravītyamsa iti jīva īśvarasyāmsō bhavitumarhati, yathagnervisphulingaḥ amsa ivāmsaḥ nahinirvayavasya mukhyo amsaḥ sambhavati."

23

Sankara's Commentary on Bhagavadgītā, XV.7.

Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra²⁴, Śankara refers to the instrumentality of God as a sādhāraṇa kāraṇa in the actions of jīva, whether good or bad.

Rāmānuja admits that the soul is a part of Brahman,²⁵ but he is aware of the fact that the category of part and whole cannot be employed with qualitative significance in the case of jivātman and Paramātman. So he says that by part in a quantitative sense we understand that which constitutes part of the extension of something'. If, then, the soul occupied part of the extension of Brahman, all its imperfections would belong to Brahman.²⁶ Hence Rāmānuja reminds us that the word 'part' (aṃśa) should be understood in a qualitative sense:

For by part we understand that which constitutes one piece of something and hence a distinguishing attribute (viśeṣaṇa) is a part of the thing distinguished by that attribute....

Now although the distinguishing attribute and the thing distinguished thereby stand to each other in the relation of part and whole, yet we observe them, to differ in essential character. Hence there is no contradiction between the individual and the Highest Self - the former of which is a viśeṣaṇa of the latter - standing to each other in relation of part and whole, and their being at the same time of essentially different nature.²⁷

²⁴ Śankara, Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, II.iii.42.

²⁵ Śrībhāṣya, II.iii.42.

²⁶ Ibid.: "brahmaṇomśo jīva ityapi na sādhiyaḥ ekavastvekadeśavācī hyaṃśaśabdah jīvasya brahmaikadeśatve tadgata doṣā brahmaṇi bhaveyuh."

²⁷ Ibid., II.iii.45: "tadvat ekavastvekadeśatvam hyaṃśatvam, viśiṣṭasyaikasya vastuno viśeṣaṇaṃśa eva. tathāca vivecakāḥ viśiṣṭe vastuni viśeṣaṇaṃśo ayam, viśeṣyāṃśoyamiti vyapadiṣanti. viśeṣaṇa viśeṣyayoraṃśaṃśitve api svabhāvavailakṣaṇyam dṛśyate....evam jīva-parayorviśeṣaṇa viśeṣyatva kṛtam svabhāva vailakṣaṇyamāśritya bhedanirdeśa."

Likewise, Dr. K. C. Varadacari defines aṃśa "as an integral portion of the divine' whole. He says:

The truest definition of an aṃśa is the definition which keeps the soul neither aloof nor isolated but keeps it inseparably and inalienably integrated with the whole, without making it lose its individual character and function. The character of the part might undergo modification in so far as it becomes conscious of its dependence on the central self of its existence, and almost wear even a diaphanous coat or body which makes one see it as if it is distinguishable from the whole.²⁸

Varadacari rightly interprets the relationship between the Supreme Person and the individual being. Thus regarding the soul as part of Brahman, Rāmānuja makes it clear that souls are only attributes or modes of Brahman. But it does not mean that souls are merely adjectival to Brahman without any individuality of their own.

It is well known that Rāmānuja conceived of the relation between the Supreme Person and the individual soul in terms of an analogy to the relation between the soul and the body (śarīri-śarīra bhāva). In the Srībhāṣya, Rāmānuja defines the relationship in the following manner.

Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purpose, and which stands up to the soul in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that soul.²⁹

In this definition, we see the three aspects of the relationship which

28

K. C. Varadacari, Srī Rāmānuja's Theory of Knowledge (Thirupathi: Srī Venketesvara Oriental Institute, 1943), p. 157.

29

Vedānta Sūtra with Rāmānuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, p. 424. Srībhāṣya, II.i.9: "ato yasya cetanasya yadr̥vyam sarvātmana svārthe niyantum dhārayitum ca śakyam taccheṣataikasvarūpam ca, tattasya śarīramiti śarīralakṣanam āstheyam."

Rāmanuja invariably cites and which are made more explicit in the following passage from the Vedārthasaṁgraha:

(i) The relationship between the self and the body (ātma-sarīra bhāva) is (ii) that between the support and thing supported (ādhāra-ādheya bhāva) which is incapable of separate existence (prthaksiddhi-anarha) (iii) that between the controller and what is controlled (niyantr-niyamya bhāva) and (iv) that between the master or owner and what is subservient to him (śeṣi-śeṣa bhāva).³⁰

The first of these three relationships, namely ādhāra-ādheya bhāva, indicates the complete dependence of the soul upon the Lord. The import of this relationship is that nothing can exist without the support of Brahman. Rāmanuja uses a number of Upaniṣadic passages to substantiate his arguments. "When he shines everything shines after him by his light does all this shine".³¹ "The author of this universe is the hub (bhuvanasya nābhiḥ) of this universe".³² "Support of beings, and not resting in beings, is my Self, that causes beings to be".³³ Rāmanuja summarizes the whole position as follows:

Some texts declare a distinction of nature between non-intelligent matter, intelligent beings, and Brahman, in so far as matter is the object of enjoyment, the souls the enjoying subjects, and Brahman the ruling principle.³⁴

The second of these relationships, that between the controller (niyantr) and the controlled (niyamya), shows that Brahman is the

³⁰ Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 76: "ayameva cātma śarīra bhāva prthaksiddha ca narha ādhāra ādheya bhāvo niyantr niyamya bhāvah śeṣa śeṣi bhāvas ca."

³¹

Kaṭha Upaniṣad, II.ii.15.

³²

Maha Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, I.6.

³³

Bhagavadgītā, IX.5.

³⁴

Sribhāṣya, I.i.1.

controller (niyantā) of the universe and the individual souls, and they in their turn are controlled (niyāmya) by him. Rāmānuja has a very subtle and sophisticated interpretation of the relationship between the control of the Inner Ruler (antaryāmin) and the activity of the soul, an interpretation necessitated primarily by difficulties raised, in fact, by his own overall emphasis upon divine control. The objections raised and the reply to it, as stated in the following passages of the Vedārthasaṅgraha, will serve as evidence. Here is the objection:

However it has been declared that the Supreme Spirit is the Inner Ruler of all creatures and that all are subject to his ruling. If this is true, then there is strictly speaking no one who can be a qualified subject of the instructions of the injunctions and prohibitions (in the scriptures)...Now this would mean that there is cruelty in God because he incites to good and evil actions arbitrarily?³⁵

The reply to the objection is as follows:

The Supreme Spirit has bestowed equally upon all spiritual beings all that is required for activity or inactivity, etc. So as to enable them to accomplish this, He has become their substratum [ādhāra] and has entered into them as the principal [śeṣi] to whom they are accessory [śeṣa] directing them by consenting. The spiritual being, whose capacities are so dependent on Him, performs of his own accord certain acts or refrains of his own accord from certain acts. But while observing the soul in all its doings the Supreme Spirit Himself takes no sides. Therefore all is sound.³⁶

35

Vedārthasaṅgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, para. 89, pp. 246-47: "nanu ca sarvasya jantoḥ paramātmāntaryāmi tanniyāmyam ca sarvamevatyuktam. evaṁ ca satī vidhī niṣedha śāstrāṇamadhikāri na drśyate. yah sabuddhayaiva pravṛtti nivṛtti śaktaḥ sa evaṁ kuryāna kuryāditi vidhī niṣedha योग्याḥ."

36

Ibid., para. 90, p. 247.

Rāmānuja's concept of the Inner Ruler governing the consent (anumati) is further explained in the Śrībhāṣya.³⁷ He maintains that the Highest Self which rules within every soul promotes action in so far as it regards in the case of any action the volitional effort made by the individual soul and then aids that effort by granting permission (anumati). Rāmānuja asserts that action is not possible without permission on the part of the Highest Self. He thinks that the case is very similar to the rights of joint owners: if one of these wishes to transfer that property to a third person, he cannot do so without the permission of his partner. But the permission is, after all, his own doing and hence the results of the action perhaps belong to him only. It is not true, however, that the Inner Ruler always maintains such a passive and neutral position. Immediately following the above passage from the Vedārthasaṅgraha, Rāmānuja continues:

Besides it depends on every individual case whether He will cause good acts or evil acts to be performed: It is not an invariable rule that He will always cause one or the other in every case. When someone of his own accord has been active before in an extremely good action, then the Venerable Lord is pleased with him and by granting him a mental disposition for good actions helps him to be so active. When, however, someone has indulged in extremely inauspicious actions, then the Venerable Lord incites him to wicked activities by giving him a wicked disposition.³⁸

³⁷ , Śrībhāṣya, II.iii.41: "sarvāsu kriyāsu puruṣeṇa kṛtaṁ prayatnam udyogamapekṣyāntaryāmi paramātma tad anumati dānena pravartayati. paramātma anumati antareṇasya pravṛttirṇo papadyata ityārtha....yatha dvayos-sādharāṇe dhane parasvatvāpādanamanyatarānumati antareṇa na upapadyate.

³⁸

Vedārthasaṅgraha, tran. Van Buitenen, para. 90, p. 247: "sādhvasādhukarmaṇoḥ kārayitṛtvaṁ tu vyavasthitaviṣayaṁ na sarva sādhāraṇam. yastu pūrva svayamevātīmātramānukūlye pravṛttastaṁ prati

The Lord, then, sometimes takes a more active role, "controlling them as animated and cheering principle", or as an animating and punishing one.

While Rāmānuja never denies that the individual soul is a responsible agent, his primary emphasis is on the Inner Ruler as the cause of all the actions of the soul. He at one point explicitly denies that the soul is free in any independent sense.³⁹ His dominant mood is expressed by his exposition in the Bhagavadgītā, XVIII.61-62, "The Lord dwells in the heart of all creatures, whirling them around as if mounted on a machine; to him go for refuge".⁴⁰ Perhaps we can understand this tension within his thought if we perceive that the soul's ability to exercise his agency in a manner contrary to the wishes of the Inner Ruler (therefore seeming to be free and independent) is not viewed by Rāmānuja as a positive capacity, but rather is seen as a defect caused by the soul's bondage in samsāra. When the soul/body relationship exists as it should, the 'body', of its

38 (Con't.)

pritaḥ svayameva bhagavān kalyāṇa budhi yoga dānam kurvankalyāṇo pravartayati. yaḥ punar atimātram prātikūlye pravṛttastasya krūrām budhiṁ dadan svayameva krūreṣvevā karmasu prerayati bhagavān."

39

Srībhāṣya, II.iii.40: "tuśabdaḥ pakṣam vyāvartayati; tat-kartṛtvam asyajīvasya parāt-paramātman eva hetorbhavati kutaḥ."

40

Quoted in Srībhāṣya, I.iv.1: "Isvaras sarva bhūtānām hr̥dḍeṣe arjuna tiṣṭhati. bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantr rūṭhāni māyaya. tameva saraṇam gaccha."

own will, should respond infallibly to the wishes of the soul. However, Rāmānuja admits that the soul's control over the body will be obstructed if the body is injured or paralysed.⁴¹ When a person gains true knowledge of the individual soul and the Supreme Spirit from scripture, he learns that his true nature is to be niyamya and he learns what the niyanta requires of him.

Rāmānuja develops the śeṣa-śeṣi relationship in his dispute with the Karma Mimāṃsā school, which uses the term śeṣa in a completely ritualistic sense.⁴² In the Vedārthasaṃgraha, Rāmānuja first gives his own definition of the relationship as it concerns the sacrifice and then, with a significant analogy, generalizes the concept.

The śeṣa-śeṣi relationship in any situation means just this: the śeṣa is that whose essential nature consists solely in being useful to something by virtue of its intention to contribute some excellence to the other (paraḥ) is the śeṣi....

In the same way, the essential nature of born slaves (garbha-dāsa) and other servants is solely that they are entities which have value for their master (puruṣa) by virtue of their intention to contribute some particular excellence to him. Likewise, the essential nature of all entities, eternal and non-eternal, intelligent and non-intelligent, is solely that they are entities which have value for the Lord by virtue of their intention to contribute some excellence to him.

⁴¹ Sribhāṣya, II.i.9: "rugna śarīrādiṣu niyamanādyadarśanaṃ vidyamānāya eva niyamaṇaśakte pratibandhakṛtam agnyādeśaśakti pratibandhā dauṣṇyādyadarśanavat mṛta śarīram ca cetana viyoga samaya eva viśaritamārabdham."

⁴² Mimāṃsā school used it to describe any subordinate part of the sacrifice which was intended to serve the principal purpose called śeṣi.

Thus everything is in the state of being subservient (śeṣabhūtam) to the Lord, and he is the master and owner of everything as is declared in texts like, "He is the ruler (vaśi) of all and the Lord of all" and the master (pati) of the universe.⁴³

This analogy expresses a good deal of Rāmaṇuja's concept of the relationship - the Lord's superiority over his creation is not only by virtue of his power, but it is what is eminently fitting or appropriate. This right of the owner implies obligation on the part of the owned - an obligation or duty which is of the nature of the categorical imperative, arising from the slave's essential nature as the slave of a rightful owner. From the above quotation, this duty is the slave's service with the "intention to contribute some excellence" to his master. This implication of the categorical imperative for Rāmaṇuja's religious system is that the devotee, as the śeṣa, must perform "service in the form of bhakti" and in the form of other acts of worship to glorify the Lord as śeṣi. "For He alone be worshipped by all always in all stages of life."⁴⁴

If we are to understand the full implication of the śeṣa-śeṣi relationship, then we must purge the master-slave analogy of all the negative and oppressive connotations generally associated with a

43

Vedārthasaṃgraha, para. 121-22: "ayameva hi sarvatra śeṣa-śeṣibhavaḥ paragata atisāyādhānecchayopādeyatvameva yasya svarūpaṃ sa śeṣaḥ paraḥ śeṣi....

evam garbhādāsādīnāmapi puruṣa viśeṣāyādhānecchayopādeyatvameva svarūpaṃ. evam īśvaragatātiśayadhānecchayopādeyatvam eva cetana acetanātmakasya nityasyānityasya ca sarvasya vastunaḥ svarūpamiti sarvam īśvara śeṣabhūtaṃ sarvasya ca īśvaraḥ śeṣa iti sarvasya vaśi sarvasyeśānaḥ patiṃ viśvasyetyā dyuktaṃ. kṛtisādhyam pradhānaṃ yattkāryamabhidhiyata ityayamarthaḥ śraddhāneṣveva śobhate.

44

Quoted in Vedārthasaṃgraha, para. 144, p. 173.

slave's dependence. These connotations were present even in Rāmaṇuja's day, and he anticipated the objection that his position is contradicted by all experience:

It seems that one great wish of all sentient beings is to be free. Dependence is a kind of suffering. And there is the smṛti "All dependence means suffering" and in the same line: "Service is called a dog's way, so try to avoid it".⁴⁵

Rāmaṇuja retorts that such an objection "must be regarded as an erroneous cognition due to karman" made by one who knows nothing about the nature of the soul or about what it means to be a slave (śeṣa) to such a master (śeṣi) as "the Supreme Person (who) is happiness in Himself."⁴⁶

There is nothing burdensome in this servitude; rather, being a śeṣa is the soul's natural and joyous fulfilment of its own being. The essential being of the finite self is ensouled by the Lord (bhagavān) because its sole 'rasa' - its essence and delight - is to be śeṣa of the bhagavān.⁴⁷ Van Buitenen notes that rasa has here the double meaning of 'essence' and 'ecstasy' for serving God as His śeṣa by the loving representation of bhakti is as such a source of extreme joy, as Rāmaṇuja repeatedly declares.⁴⁸ The observation brings out that the synonymous word 'rati' is used in the introduction to the

45

Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 143, p. 171: "tatha hi sarveṣāmeva cetanānām svatantryameveṣṭataṃ dr̥ṣyate, paratantryaṃ dukhataram. smṛtiśca- sarva paravaśaṃ dukham sarvamātmavaśaṃ sukham."

46

Ibid.

47

Ibid., para. 78, p. 116.

48

Vedārthasaṅgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, p. 238, fn. 349.

Gītabhāṣya, describing the Lord's eternal attendants (sūris) as those whose sole essence and joy is to be his śeṣas. This aspect of fulfilment and joy - finally even bliss - in God's service, taken together with the fact that the object of this service, God, is himself joy and bliss, is an essential element in Rāmānuja's means of release. This aspect alone accounts for the fact that the performance of bhakti is "immeasurably and overwhelmingly dear to the devotee" and that bhakti gains "the sense of a kind of love (prīti) which is essential to the highest bhakti (para bhakti)".⁴⁹ This aspect makes the soul completely subordinate to and reliant on the Lord (Prapatti), which is not only a metaphysical fact to be understood, not only an imperative to be obeyed, but also a joy to be realized.

These relationships indicate the complete dependence of the soul upon the Lord, which, although integral to the concept of Prapatti, is not of primary importance for us here. We will discuss it later in the fifth chapter.

49

Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 144, p. 173.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE AND STATUS OF JÑĀNA IN MOKṢOPĀYA

The epistemological enquiry is always the backbone of metaphysics, the truth of which can be found in the philosophies of Śankara and Rāmānuja. Before discussing the position of Rāmānuja and the problems raised by him in the field of epistemology, a brief description of Śankara's point of view would be appropriate.

The concept of jñāna in Advaita Vedānta

It is impossible to have any appreciation of Advaita philosophy, apart from an understanding of its tremendous quest for ultimate oneness of reality, from which the multiplicity of phenomena have come into existence and in which the phenomenal existence finds both its contingent meaning and ultimate release. The key to both the meaning and the release lies in the capacity to transcend the phenomenal with all its fragmentation in ultimate oneness of saccidānanda, from which it has appeared to have been sundered by reason of existence, cognition, and sorrow.

Man is bound to the phenomenal world by desire. At the root of this attachment is avidyā, which is mainly responsible for multiplicity. Thus, in the Commentary on the Brhādaranyaka Upaniṣad, Śankara says:

In the presence of the particular or individual aspect of the self due to the limiting

adjuncts of the body and organs conjured up by ignorance, there is duality, as it were, in Brahman, which really is one without a second, i.e., there appears to be something different from the self.¹

But the remarkable point is that this false duality is assumed not merely in the realm of sense/experience, but the distinction made between this self and Īsvara is equally false. If one knows the inner meaning of the mahāvākya, "That art Thou",² he is freed from ignorance.

In this Upaniṣad deliverance is the outcome, not simply of knowledge of a purely academic kind, but of a knowledge which is an attitude or activity of the whole self. The term 'knowledge' can be misleading when applied to the process through which mokṣa is mediated. As we ordinarily understand knowledge, there is involved in it a knowing subject and a known object. But the knowledge which is deliverance is a knowledge in which this duality is transcended.³

The Advaita begins with the empirical world⁴ of human existence. According to it, one knows objects through sense perception and ideas through conception. So the Advaita does not maintain that the universe, as it presents itself to the ordinary mind, is simple illusion (māyā). The phenomenal world, according to the Advaita, is the outcome of avidyā, but it has a certain relative and contingent reality or

¹ / Sankara, Commentary on the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, trans. Swami Madhavananda, p. 373.

² / Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.viii.7.

³ / Sankara, Commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, with Gaudapada's Kārika, p. 78: "It is incomprehensible, because both speech and mind which correspond to the name and the object disappear or cease".

⁴ / Sankara uses the term 'vyāvahārika', which in the ultimate analysis is only māyā.

existence. It is real for him who has not attained to the true knowledge of Brahman. The worshipper who worships Brahman as a personal deity really worships Brahman,⁵ and he who speaks of Brahman as the creator of the world⁶ speaks what is true. But in all of these, the individual is at the stage of lower wisdom (apara vidyā). Hence Sankara distinguishes this order of knowing from knowledge by absolute identity (para vidyā).

According to the Advaita, one has to move from the level of lower wisdom to the higher, which, in fact, is release (mokṣa). The Advaita has prescribed the techniques of attaining this highest goal. One in the level of lower wisdom may perform the daily religious rituals for the sake of acquiring virtues. A man who has properly discharged all the obligations that are enjoined on him by the vedas will exhibit certain characteristics which qualify him for the study of Vedānta. They are as follows:

1. Discrimination between the eternal and phenomenal (nityānitya-vastu viveka).
2. The renunciation of the desire to enjoy sensual pleasures in this world and the next (ihāmūtrārtha bhoga viragah).
3. Cultivation of six virtues, viz., śama, dama, uparati, titikṣā, samādhi, and śraddhā (śama damādi sādhana sampat).
4. The desire for liberation (mumukṣatva).

⁵
Bhagavadgītā, IX.23.

⁶
Vedānta Sūtra, I.2.

All of these prerequisites will only help one to learn Brahma vidya. But the knowledge is generated by the hearing (śravaṇa) of the sacred texts that teach the identity of the individual self and the Brahman by the reflection (manana) and contemplation (nididhyāsana) thereon.⁷ All Vedānta ācāryas have accepted these three steps of discipline, but the interpretations differ. Sankara explicates them in the light of his Advaita discipline.

Śravaṇa

Hearing of the sacred text is a very significant step⁸ in the scheme of mokṣa, because the ultimate philosophic truth is to be realized through a study of śruti. Secondly, it emphasizes the need for personal intercourse with a competent teacher, who is not only a mere learned man, but one who has realized the highest truth - a jīvanmukta.⁹ A guru makes the student understand the ultimate truth

⁷ Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.4.5: "Śrotavyo, mantavyo, nididhyāsītavyah. maitreyī, ātmano va darsānena śravaṇeramatya vijñānenedam sarvam viditam.

⁸ The post-Śankarites debate on this issue; Vacaspati Miśra maintains that śravaṇa is the cause of the mediate knowledge of Brahman and an indirect means to its immediate knowledge, which is attained through nididhyāsana. See K. Satchidananda Murthy, Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 120. The Vivaraṇa school, on the contrary, holds that the śravaṇa is the direct means to the immediate knowledge of Brahman, manana and nididhyāsana are subsidiary to it. Vacaspati's argument is closer to Sankara's own position. Sankara says: "śāstram yuktir deśikokti pramāṇam cānta siddhā svānubhūtiḥ pramāṇam." (Viveka-Chudāmani, 475), and again, "tatasthītā bodhayanti guruvaḥ śrutayo yathā. Prajñā eva tared vidvānsim Iśvaranugrahitayā." (Ibid., 476).

⁹ Sankara, Commentary on the Bhagavadgīta, IV.34: "yehi samyagdarsinah tair upadiṣṭam jñānam kārykṣamaṁ bhavati netarat."

by different methods. This redemptive act of a guru is mainly motivated by grace.

Manana

Manana is the second stage of discipline. After receiving the instruction from the teacher, the student has to achieve intellectual conviction by making use of his own powers of reasoning. Śankara has pointed out that the knowledge takes shape only by hard and vigorous thinking. As the result of thinking, manana secures intellectual conviction.

Nididhyāsana

This is the final stage in which all the obstacles on the way of mokṣa will be eliminated. This is the meditation upon the identity between the individual self and Brahman.¹⁰ It should be continued until the desired intuitive knowledge arises.¹¹ Śankara says: "The truth of Brahman is clearly and decisively realized by nirvikalpaka samādhi, and not by any other way, in which it is apt to be mixed up with alien ideas because of the fluctuation of the mind."^{11a} Śankara employs a parable to illustrate the truth about the advaitic doctrine of mukti:

A prince, soon after his birth, is abducted and brought up by a hunter in the forest. He leads the life of a hunter totally ignorant of his

¹⁰ Śankara, Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, IV.i.11: "nididhyāsanam ca antarnītā āvṛttiguṇaiva krīyābhidhīyate."

¹¹ Ibid., IV.i.1: "darśana paryavasānāni hi śravanādini āvartya manāni drṣṭārthāni bhavanti yathāvaghātādini hi taṇḍulādinīṣpattiparyavasānāni tadvat."

^{11a}

Ibid.

identity. Later, upon attaining manhood, he feels a noble and novel spirit striving within himself, and there grows a sense of total estrangement from his immediate environment. Now it happens that a kind and trustworthy courtier from his father's court meets him and reveals to him his royal status. His artificial and unbecoming status as a hunter falls off and he just recognizes his innate royalty.¹²

The interpretation of Tattvamasi

The most important Upaniṣadic text 'Tattvamasi',¹³ just like the words of the courtier in the parable, is a key to the realization of the ultimate unity. Śankara regards this text as the very foundation of his school.¹⁴ According to his interpretation, 'thou' denotes the individual soul, and 'that' indicates the ground of the whole world which is unborn, immortal, real, and eternal.¹⁵ Śankara explicates the process of realization as a very simple one: when the individual soul is told that he is the Brahman, his individuality falls away. Later on, Suresvara, a post-Śankarite scholar, interprets the 'Tattvamasi' text as a lakṣaṇa vākya.¹⁶ In other words, he takes this text only in its implied sense (lakṣyārtha) and not in its literal

12 /
Śankara, Commentary on the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.i.20.

13
Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.viii.7. Uddālaka repeats this nine times in the sixth chapter.

14 /
Śankara, Commentary on the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, I.iv.7.

15 /
Śankara, Commentary on the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.xvi.3.

16
K. Satchidananda Murthy, Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 91:
"lakṣaṇā is said to be of four kinds: (1) jahallakṣaṇā, (2) ajahallakṣaṇā, (3) jahallajahallakṣaṇā, (4) guna vṛtti."

sense.¹⁷ The Advaita uses a stock example, such as, "This is that Devadatta", in order to explain the implication of the above-mentioned mahāvākya. Suppose two people have seen one Devadatta at one place and after years the same people met the same Devadatta at another place. Devadatta was recognized, in spite of all his physical and mental changes, by one of them. He said to the other: "Look, this is that Devadatta". He could recognize Devadatta because he omitted the accidental changes and retained the essential nature of Devadatta, who is known to him in the past and at present. Thus, when Suresvara asserts the identity of Brahman and jīva; actually the jīva, with the ego, is not asserted to be identical with Brahman. "Thus the part of the usual meaning of the individual self (thou) is abandoned and part of it is retained, while by 'that' also is not meant as usual as pure consciousness, which is remote",¹⁸ but pure consciousness alone is meant. So the Advaitins assert that the achievement of mokṣa is only a realization of the true nature of ātman through the instructions of such Upaniṣadic texts as 'Tattvamasi', and 'aham brahmā 'smi'.

It is impossible to express the nature of realization (sākṣātkāra) by employing the categories of symbolic consciousness. The Māndūkya Upaniṣad delineates the transcendental experience of mokṣa thus:

It is imperceptible, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnamable, inconceivable,

¹⁷ Suresvara, Naīskarmya Siddhi, trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 1959), II.5; III.44-45.

¹⁸ K. Satchidānanda Murthy, op. cit., p. 92.

indefinable, which is a pure self-awareness; which is the cessation of the manifold, the peaceful, the blissful and non-dual.¹⁹

Yājñavalkya also explains the truth to his wife Maitreyī: "After attaining (this oneness) it has no more consciousness".²⁰ This knowledge is a non-phenomenological perception which cannot be understood in terms of a knower knowing and a knowable object, because 'the knower and knowable become fused into indivisible unitary consciousness'.²¹ Dr. John Arapura, in one of his recent articles, says that the language, which is the symbolic expression of the phenomenal consciousness, cannot really express the reality. "The flight beyond the third level is above the realm of word and imagination. The word Brahman itself is phenomenal and as one expression of the universal language of 'aum', it too is designed to boomerang back to the cosmos."²² In this respect, the Vedānta is not far away from the Mādhyamika. Dr. T. R. V. Murti remarks: "Absolute truth is beyond the scope of discursive thought, language, and empirical activity."²³

19

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, VII: "na prajñam, adṛṣṭam, avyavahāryam, agrāhyam, alakṣaṇam, acintyam, avyapadeśyam, ekātma-pratyaya sāram, prapañcopaśamam, śāntam, śivam, advaitam."

20

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, II.iv.12: "na pretya samjñāsti." Sankara says, "has no more particular consciousness" (viśeṣa samjñā). See The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Sankarācārya, trans. Swami Mādhavānanda, p. 370.

21

Swāmi Sat Prakāshananda, Methods of Knowledge (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1965), p. 248.

22

J. G. Arapura, 'Language and Phenomena', Canadian Journal of Theology, XVI, 1+2 (1970), p. 44.

23

T. R. V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1955), p. 224.

In other words, the final truth can only be metaphysically perceived in which the phenomenal consciousness discovers its non-real being in terms of existence, and into which the non-real being of empirical existence disappears when the Absolute Reality is realized.²⁴ The realization of oneself as Brahman, although it is inexpressible, is the anubhava of mokṣa. This realization (brahmātmabhāva) is the higher knowledge (para vidyā) of the Advaita.

Rāmānuja's concept of jñāna

Rāmānuja does not consider jñāna as the only way to mokṣa, as the Advaitins maintain, but, in his opinion, bhakti which is generated by knowledge is the means of release. Therefore, he always relates knowledge with bhakti and asserts that bhakti is a kind of knowledge.

There is a common misunderstanding among the Advaita scholars that bhakti²⁵ is only an expression of emotion and hence the means of release prescribed by Rāmānuja is very simple.²⁶ But unlike the Ālvārs and the early exponents of the Viśiṣṭādvaita, Rāmānuja made bhakti a philosophical category by maintaining that all scriptural references denoting 'knowledge' or 'knowing' meditation are synonymous

24

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, II.iv.12.

25

S. Rādhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgītā (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1963), pp. 61-62.

26

R. D. Karmarkar, Śribhāṣya of Rāmānuja, Vol. I, p. xxxiii: "Steeped in the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā and the Viṣṇu Pūraṇa as he was, he surely brings philosophy from heaven to earth, so as to be within the reach of women, Vaiśyas and sūdras, etc., as the Bhagavadgītā puts it. Mokṣa or salvation can be achieved by the simple method...."

with bhakti. He remarks that the śruti passages teach that bhakti is meditation or reverent concentration and that as such it is the effect of devout representation.²⁷ In this connection, he quotes the Svetāśvetāra Upaniṣad and the Taittiriya Āraṇyaka,²⁸ where this worship by bhakti is called jñāna, in order to prove that bhakti is not merely a path of emotion but an intellectual enterprise. Like Śankara, Rāmānuja also makes a distinction between the lower knowledge and the higher knowledge. To Rāmānuja, bhakti is equivalent to Śankara's higher knowledge (para vidyā). He says:

Two vidyas are fit to be known by one desirous of attaining to Brahman - in the case of Brahman, two vijñānas, direct and indirect, have to be resorted to - this is the sense. Here the indirect (parokṣa) knowledge derived from śāstra, while the direct (aparokṣa) knowledge derived from mystic communion. Of the two, direct knowledge is the means of attaining to Brahman, and that takes the form of bhakti.²⁹

The same idea is expressed in another passage.³⁰ Commenting on the Bhagavadgītā, XI.53-55, Rāmānuja states that bhakti is not mere knowledge which could be extracted from the scriptures and personal

27

Rāmānuja, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, Introduction to Chapter VII.

28

Taittiriya Āraṇyaka, III.xii.17, quoted in Van Buitenen's Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 99, fn. 282: "tam eva vidvān amṛta iha bhavati na anyañ panthā ayanāya vidyate."

29

Sribhāṣya, I.ii.23: "brahma prepsunā dve vidye yeditavye- brahma viṣaye parokṣāparokṣa rupe dve vijñāne upādeye ityārtha- atra parokṣam śāstra janyam jñānam aparokṣa yoga janyam jñānam. tayorbrahma prāptupāya bhūtam aparokṣa jñānam tacca bhakti rūpāpannam."

30

Ibid.: "api ca samrādhane bhakti rūpāpanne nididhyāsana evasya sākṣātkāra."

experience, but it is direct confrontation with God. "It is only through bhakti that God may be either known by the śāstras, or experienced directly, or approached as He really is."³¹

Rāmānuja, in his Vedārthasaṅgraha, equates the term bhakti with jñāna. This service in the form of bhakti is denoted by the word for knowing in the śrutis.³² He presents the rationale of this doctrine with the aid of numerous śrutis,³³ which we will discuss after defining the term jñāna.

According to Śankara, jñāna is the realization of the non-dual reality which is the result of the cessation of avidyā. Commenting on a passage of the Māndukya Kārika,³⁴ Śankara remarks:

The word jñānam signifies knowledge by which one grasps the significance of the three states. The word jñeya or knowable, signifies the three states which should be known. The first (knowable) consists of the gross state (waking state) of empirical experience. Then comes the state of subtle experience in which the first loses itself, i.e., merges.... Thus the knower (possessed of the highest power of discrimination) attains in this very life the state of omniscience which is identical with the knowledge of the self. He is called mahādhiḥ (the knower of truth) or the man of highest intellect as he has understood that which transcends all human

31

J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 132.

32

Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 144: "itiyameva bhaktirūpa sevā brahma vidānyeti."

33

Taittiriya Upaniṣad, II.i.
Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, IV.11.9.

34

Māndukya Kārika, IV.89: "jñāne ca thrividhe jñeya krameṇa vidite svayam. sarvajñatā hi sarvatra bhavatiḥ mahādhiḥ."

experiences.³⁵

It is very clear from this statement that the highest knowledge of the Advaita is the realization of identity between the individual soul and Brahman.

Rāmānuja's definition of knowledge is fundamentally different from that of Śankara.

Knowledge is mental energy different in character from the mere cognition of the sense of texts and more specifically denoted by such terms as dhyāna or upāsanā, (meditation) which is of the nature of remembrance (i.e., representative thought), but in intuitive clearness is not inferior to the clearest presentative thought (pratyakṣa); which by constant daily practice becomes even more perfect, and being duly continued up to death secures final release.³⁶

This definition, indeed, reflects the fundamental religious thought of Rāmānuja. According to Rāmānuja, the right knowledge can be acquired only by those who have heard from the śrutis the real nature of Īśvara and his relationship to Jīva, have reasoned over it and have fully meditated on its content. Van Buitenen defines Rāmānuja's notion of knowledge as follows: "As a matter of fact to know Brahman in Rāmānuja's sense, that is to ascend to knowing the personal God through constant

35

Śankara, Commentary on the Māndūkya Upaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārika, trans. Swami Nikhilānanda, p. 299.

36

Śrībhāṣya, trans. George Thibaut, III.iv.26, p. 699: "jñānam ca vākyārtha jñānād arthāntara bhūtam dhyānopāsanādi śabda vācyam viśadatmā pratyakṣatatpanna smṛti rūpam niratiśaya priyamaharaharabhyā-sādheyātiśaya aprayānad anuvartamānam mokṣa sādhanam ityuktam asmābhiḥ."

loving adoration, is the final stage of one road to perfection, leading from the conscientious performance of ritual acts to the self-cognition of the individual soul and from there to the love attainment of the supreme God, whom to serve is the soul's sole purpose and essence."³⁷

The ultimate structure of a philosophical position is determined largely by the answers which a system has to provide to queries in the field of epistemology. Therefore, we summarize Rāmanuja's theory of knowledge in order to get a clear picture of his philosophical position.

Rāmanuja maintains that an attributeless (nirguṇa) reality is inconceivable and cannot be proved to exist by any of the means of knowledge. "As for the convention again, accepted in their own (the Advaita) school it (nirviśeṣa vastu) is proved by its experience, - that also is ruled out by the experience itself of the distinctive attributes with ātman as the witness; because all the experiences have for their object something particularized by some qualifying attribute."³⁸

In other words, even in intuition the notion of attributes is always present, both in the case of consciousness itself and the object intuited. In the case of savikalpaka (reflective) and nirvikalpaka (non-reflective) knowledge, both have for their objects things characterized with attributes:

37

Van Buitenen, Rāmanuja's Vedārthasamgraha, p. 53.

38, -

Sribhāṣya, I.i.1, para. 328: "yastu svānubhava siddhamiti svagoṣṭhi niṣṭhā: samayaḥ soapyātma-sākṣika saviśeṣānubhavād eva nirastah: idam aham adarsam iti kenacid viśeṣaṇa viśiṣṭa viṣayatvāt sarveṣām anubhavānām."

The reflective is concerned with an object having distinctive attributes on account of its having definitely for its province something particularized by more than one object, such as generality and others. The indeterminate also is definitely concerned with an object with distinctive attributes on account of its being in the cause of the continuity of the particularized impression about objects experienced in the self, in the matter of the determinate.³⁹

According to Rāmānuja, nothing can be cognized apart from some particular form or the structure of the object. Here we observe that Rāmānuja restricts the import of the term nirvikalpaka knowledge, which is the apprehension of the first individual out of a number of things belonging to the same class.⁴⁰ Rāmānuja points out "indeterminate perception is the apprehension of an object devoid of some qualifications but not all qualifications".⁴¹ So all knowledge, including that of the paramātman, is necessarily of an object with attributes. The cognition of a nirguna Brahman is impossible.

Knowledge in general always and necessarily manifests itself as related to a subject and having reference to an object.⁴² Rāmānuja maintains that knowledge is the essential attribute of the self. The

39

Ibid., I.i.1, para. 29: "savikalpakam jātyadyaneka padārtha viśiṣṭa viśayatvādeva saviśeṣa viśayam eva. nirvikalpakaṁ api saviśeṣa viśayameva, savikalpaka svabhinna anubhūta padārtha viśiṣṭa prati samdhāna hetutvāt."

40

Ibid., "ato nirvikalpaka eka jātiya śabdeṣu prathama-piṇḍa grahaṇam."

41

Ibid., "nirvikalpakaṁ nāma kenacid viśeṣaṇa viyuktasya grahaṇam na sarva viśeṣa-rahitasya."

42

Srībhāṣya, I.i.1, para. 34.

function of such knowledge is to reveal objects through the respective sense organs. Whenever knowledge reveals an object, there arises the cognition.

Here Rāmanuja makes two points clear regarding the nature and validity of knowledge.

- (1) All means of knowledge and all states of consciousness have as their object something marked by difference.
- (2) There is no consciousness without an object, and every state of consciousness is the state of a subject, the 'I' from whom it is clearly distinguished.

Rāmanuja brings up a new interpretation of the mahavākya, 'tat tvam asi', which is presented briefly in his Vedārthasaṅgraha⁴³ and described elaborately in the Śrībhāṣya.⁴⁴ Rāmanuja thinks that unless one takes pains to scrutinize the sadvidyā, which is presented in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, one cannot comprehend the true sense of 'tat tvam asi'. Therefore, he explains the context of the text in detail.⁴⁵ The father of Śvetaketu described the role of sat in the process of creation; sat is the material cause, the operative cause, the substratum, the controller and the principal of the entire phenomenal world of sentient and non-sentient entities.⁴⁶ Then the relation between the

⁴³ Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 18, 19, 20.

⁴⁴ Śrībhāṣya, I.i.13, para. 130-135.

⁴⁵ Ibid., para. 130.

⁴⁶ Vedārthasaṅgraha, 18: "evam samastha cid acid ātmaka prapañcasya sad upadānā sannimitta....(sanmūla, saumyemā sarva prajāḥ sadāyatanāḥ satpratiṣṭhaḥ ityadinā)."

cause and effect⁴⁷ is explained to Svetaketu. Here Rāmanuja uses the analogy of the soul and body relationship to explain the macrocosmic harmony between the phenomenal world, sentient, non-sentient, and the Supreme Person who is the inner soul of everything. He says that the words 'idam sarvam' refer to the phenomenal world of sentient and non-sentient entities and 'aitadātmyam' indicates that God is the soul of the phenomenal world.⁴⁸ This inseparable relation between God and the phenomenal world, however, is not an absolute identity. Ramanuja says that it is illogical and unimaginable that an individual soul, which entirely depends upon God for its sustenance, can be identical with God.

Sankara, on the contrary, asserts that this Upaniṣadic proposition indicates an absolute identity between Brahman and the individual soul. Individual being, according to Sankara, is only the pure consciousness of Brahman encased in a physical body. It is not very clear whether Sankara interprets 'tat tvam asi' as a lakṣaṇā vākya. He does not indicate lakṣaṇā in his Chāndogya Upaniṣad bhāṣya. However, in the Upadeśasahasri,⁴⁹ he states that positive and negative formulation can be used to establish the sense of the text, which implies lakṣaṇā. He says that the sentence 'tat tvam asi' is an identity judgment which

47

Ibid., "vistāreṇa pratipādyā kārya karaṇa."

48

Ibid., para. 19: "eitadātmyam idam sarvam iti cetana acetana prapañcam idam sarvam iti nirdiśya tasya prapañcasya eṣa ātmeti pratipāditah."

49

Sankara, Upadeśasahasri, ed. Vasudeva Laxman Sastri Pansikar (Bombay: Pandurang Jawaji, 1930), Part II, 177-183.

means that the ātman can be established by abstracting the notion of the empirical ego.⁵⁰ One stanza of the Upadesasahasri clearly shows that Sankara uses jahadajahallakṣaṇā. He remarks: "The word tat has the meaning of interior self, the word tvam has the meaning of the word tat; both words drop part of their meaning, tvam that of the empirical ego, tat that of non-self."⁵¹ Sankara, in his Viveka Cūdamani, brings out the lakṣaṇā interpretation of 'tat tvam asi'. "The identity of the two indicated and predicated cannot be proved on account of mutually exclusive attributes (that is, when the ātman is connected with upādhi)."⁵² Later, Suresvara follows Sankara's view, as expressed in the Upadesasahasri, very closely. But Dharmarāja rejects the view of Suresvara. According to Dharmarāja, 'tat tvam asi' is not a lakṣaṇā vākya because the words 'that' and 'thou' are referring only to the substantives and not their attributes. His theory is based upon a prior assumption that the words directly refer to substantives and not to the attributes of substantives, and when words have to refer to

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Ibid., 183: "vākyaṛtho vyajyate caivam kevalo aham padārthah. duḥkhīty etadapohena pratyagātmaniscayāt."

51

Ibid., 193: "tacchabdah pratyagātmarthas tacchabdārthas tvamas tatha. duḥkhitvāpratyagātmatvam vareyatam ubhav api."

52,

Sankara, Viveka Cūdamani: "aikyam tayorlakṣitayorna vācyayo nirgadyato anyonya viruddha dharmiṇoḥ." And also, ibid., 249: "tatastu tau lakṣaṇāya sulakṣyan tayor ghandaikara satva siddhaye / nālamtjahatyā na tatha jahatyā kim tubhayārthatmikaivabhāvyam." "Therefore, having ascertained these attributes, their identity is established just as that of a figure of speech which loses its original meaning and takes an additional sense. But in order to realize this identity, neither the literal nor the figurative signification is to be lost sight of, both must be united in order to realize the identity."

attributes, they do so by implication.⁵³

Rāmaṇuja does not assume lakṣaṇa in the proposition 'Thou art that'. There is no need, in his viewpoint, to resort to explicating the identity of 'tat' and 'tvam' because they denote the same being in different conditions. For instance, the proposition 'This is that Devadatta' simply shows that Devadatta qualified by one set of conditions at one time is identical with Devadatta qualified with another set of conditions at another time. So all differences between these two are accounted for by the difference in time.⁵⁴ Therefore, Rāmaṇuja says that the Supreme Person, as the cause of the universe, is identical with the Inner Ruler of the jīva.⁵⁵ He remarks: "Here, there is no lakṣaṇā at all, for there is no contradiction when a person who is in past was connected with one place is at present

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Sureśvara, Naiṣkarmya Siddhi, trans. A. J. Alston, II.9: "Without reasoning (anvaya and vyatireka), there is no understanding of the meaning of the texts, and without this nescience cannot be destroyed." II.8: And without hearing the holy texts one does not come into possession of the necessary words and their meanings... how can one find a proper basis for the practice of reasoning according to the method of agreement and difference."

54

Dharmarāja, Vedānta Paribhāṣa, trans. S. S. Suryanārayaṇa Sastri (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1942), p. 74: "vayantu brūmaḥ. 'so ayam devatta' tat tvam asi' ityādan viśiṣṭa vacakānam padanām ekadeśaparatve api na lakṣaṇa; saktiupasthita visistayor bhedānvaya anupapattau viśeṣyayoḥ saktiupasthita yorevānvaya bōdhāvirodhāt." (IV.27)

55

Vedārthasamgraha, 25: "so ayam devadatta ityatrāpi lakṣaṇā-gandho na vidyate. virodhābhavat. ekasya bhūta vartamāna krīyadvaya sambandho na viruddhaḥ. desa dvaya virodhasca kāla bhedena pariḥṭah." "In the given illustration 'so ayam devadatta', there is not even a semblance of lakṣaṇā because there is no contradiction at all. It is not at all contrary that the one and the same person is involved in different actions, one past and present." (trans. Van Buitenen, op. cit., p. 199.)

56

Ibid.

connected with another place."⁵⁷ In other words, according to Rāmānuja, these two terms 'tat' and 'tvam' signify the identity between two forms of the same reality. In this sense, 'tat tvam asi' is a typical example of sāmānādhikarāṇa (construction of co-ordination).⁵⁸ He defines sāmānādhikarāṇa thus: "Case of co-ordination points out to one and the same object by words; responsible for different activity."⁵⁹ The word tat refers to Brahman as the one who is the cause of the world, the abode of all perfections, the immaculate and untransmutable one; whereas tvam refers to that same Brahman under the aspect of Inner Ruler of the individual soul as being modified by the embodied soul. So it is said that the words tat and tvam both apply to the same Brahman, but under different aspects.⁶⁰ Here we find the cardinal difference between the Advaita and the Viśiṣṭādvaita. The Upaniṣadic proposition 'tat tvam asi', in Rāmānuja's opinion, does not express the absolute oneness of one differenceless substance, because substance without attributes cannot become the object of knowledge. Therefore, he says that the Upaniṣadic statement denotes qualified identity, the identity of the same being under different conditions.

57

Vedārthasaṅgraha, 25: "lakṣaṇā abhāva evoktaṅ deśantara sambandhitayā bhūtasyaiva anya deśa sambandhitaya vartamānatva avirodhāt."

58

Sāmānādhikarāṇa is a grammatical term: community of case relation of two or more words.

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Srībhāṣya, I.i.13: "bhinnapravṛtti nimittānām śabdānām ekāsmiṇ. arthe vṛtti sāmānādhikarāṇam."

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Vedārthasaṅgraha, 20: "tatra ca tatpadam jagat kārāṇa bhūtam sakala kalyāṇa guṇagaṅgāram niravadyam nirvikāramācāṣṭe tvam iti ca tadeva brahmā jīvantaryāmirūpeṇa sa śarīra prakāra viśiṣṭamācāṣṭe."

Sankara and Rāmānuja both made sincere efforts in interpreting the same scripture with utmost loyalty to their traditions, but they ended up with different conclusions. Basically, the difference in the way that Sankara and Rāmānuja interpret the text arises from the variance in viewpoints concerning the character of the Absolute. Sankara starts with an abstract notion and Rāmānuja starts with a supremely personal one.

Rāmānuja does not find the Advaitic sense of knowledge in the śrutis, but, in his opinion, they denote only the term upāsana or dhyāna.⁶¹ Man's reaching out towards a fuller knowledge of God quietly and meditatively is known as bhakti in Rāmānuja's thought.⁶² Bhakti leads to the realization which is not the absolute identity, but only the knowledge of the inseparable relation between the individual soul and God. So Rāmānuja takes pains to prove that bhakti is in the line of knowledge because it helps one to get the deeper understanding of God and soul. He quotes śruti passages from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad in which 'vid' (to know) and 'upas' (to worship) are seen to be used indiscriminately in the beginning and in the conclusion.⁶³ So Rāmānuja maintains that upāsana or dhyāna is equal to jñāna. Dhyāna, which

⁶¹ Srībhāṣya, I.i.1, para. 12: "ato vakyārtha jñānadanyadeva dhyānopāsanaḥ śabda vacyam jñānam vedantavakyair vidhītam."

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S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 704.

⁶³

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, III.xviii.1: "mano brahmotyupāsita."
Ibid., III.xviii.3: "bhāti ca tapati ca kīrtyā yaśasa brahmavarcaśena ya evam veda."

is the succession of memories (remembrances) uninterrupted like a stream of oil,⁶⁴ has the character of direct perception,⁶⁵ because memory is an intensification of mental conception. Therefore, Rāmānuja asserts the idea that the 'vedana' (knowledge which is enjoined in all the Upaniṣads as the means of liberation) is spoken of as upāsana.⁶⁶ He quotes Vākyakāra (Tānka) in this connection, in order to substantiate his thesis. "Vedana (knowledge) is upāsana (meditation) on account of its being mentioned in the scriptures so as to refer to that."⁶⁷ Rāmānuja, therefore, on the basis of scripture, reasoning, and the statements of ancient masters, comes to the conclusion that bhakti, which is synonymous with upāsana, is a kind of knowledge.⁶⁸

It could be asked why Rāmānuja takes so much pain in establishing the fact that bhakti is a category of knowledge. A reasonable answer to this question would be that Rāmānuja wanted to maintain a distinction between mere emotion and contemplation based on knowledge. He might have come across many popular religious movements which use the term bhakti without any deeper understanding of the term. This popular use of bhakti as an expression of feelings makes a general impression among the scholars, particularly among the Advaitins, that bhakti is emotionalism. But Rāmānuja's religious thought does not fall under the

⁶⁴ Sribhāṣya, I.i.1, para. 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid.: "ityanena nididhyāsanasya darśanarūpatā vidhiyate."

⁶⁶ Ibid.: "sarvāsūpaniṣatsu mokṣa sādhanatayā vihitam vedanam upāsana ityuktam."

⁶⁷ Ibid.: "vedanam upāsanam syāt tad viṣaye śravaṇāt."

⁶⁸ Ibid., IV.i.1.

category of emotionalism, and this is what he tries to prove in the Sribhasya.

The early exponents of the Viśiṣṭādvaita incorporated the hymns of the Ālvārs and used them in the temples at the time of public worship, but it seems that Rāmānuja was reluctant to use these materials as authoritative statements. We do not come across any direct quotations from the hymns of the Ālvārs in his philosophical writings. It shows that Rāmānuja intentionally disregarded emotionally oriented religion and the popular meaning of bhakti. He treated bhakti, on the contrary, as a Vedāntic term which deals with the ultimate knowledge. He finds support for his thesis in the writings of the early Vedānta scholars, who advocated a bhakti saturated with knowledge.

Rāmānuja also avoided extreme emotional religious practices. The reference to mādhurya bhāva, or the analogy of the relation between lover and beloved, occurs only once in Rāmānuja's writings, and that too in a very sophisticated fashion, in order to express the intensity of the Lord's anxiety to meet his devotee. "The name of Gopala Kṛṣṇa is conspicuous by its absence"⁶⁹ in Rāmānuja's works. It is a probability that Rāmānuja, being aware of the highly emotional materials of the Gopala Kṛṣṇa cult, eliminated them from his religious system. In other words, he was prudent in selecting his

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R. G. Bhandarkar, Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 56. According to Dasgupta, this does not occur in Rāmānuja, because the Bhagavata Purāṇa, which is the main source of the Gopala Kṛṣṇa cult, came into prominence only in the beginning of the 12th century. See Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. IV, p. 1. Van Buitenen also notices the absence of the Bhagavata Purāṇa materials in Rāmānuja's writings, but he does not maintain any theory about it.

materials and thereby guarded himself from criticism by the Advaita. Dr. T. R. V. Murti, a champion of the Advaita philosophy, appropriately describes the nature of knowledge in one of his articles.⁷⁰ Realization, according to him, could be had only through a critical analysis of experience and negation of ignorance. "It might be seen, therefore, that feeling has no place as the accredited means of self-realization. It is what is abstracted and rejected as non-knowledge like the illusory snake in whose form the rope appears."⁷¹ This evaluation is very apt with regard to the popular bhakti movements which advocate highly emotional cultic practices, such as assuming the attitude of a helper of Rādha and so on. But Rāmānuja's bhakti is the result of knowledge, the knowledge which is originated by the traditional Vedāntic disciplines of śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana. Rāmānuja's concept of bhakti is, therefore, fundamentally different from that of popular bhakti movements and is thereby not subject to this criticism.

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T. R. V. Murti, 'The place of feeling in conduct', The Indian Philosophical Congress, 1936, p. 52.

71

Ibid.

CHAPTER V

BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI AS RĀMĀNUJA'S MOKṢOPĀYA

It may be evident from what has been described in the preceding chapter that the description of bhakti as a category of knowledge is, according to Rāmanuja, the main purport of the śrutis. Let us now attempt to get as clear a picture of Rāmanuja's mokṣopāya and how Rāmanuja integrates jñāna, karma, and bhakti within it. Accordingly, attention is first called to a passage of the Vedārthasamgraha, which is a detailed account of the path to the attainment of release.

When a person has caused the mass of evil karman, amassed during all his previous existence, to melt away by amassing unequalled good karman; when he has become wholly dedicated to God as a result of his taking refuge (saranagati) as his lotus-like feet when he has acquired the moral qualities, sama dama...etc., and nourishes them by exercising them daily and applying to them his preceding knowledge of the true nature of the ontological orders gathered from the sāstras and corroborated by the teachings of the two ācaryas which devotes himself to the accomplishment of periodical and occasional acts corresponding to his station and stage of life, as the forms in which he is to worship the Supreme Person and avoids what is forbidden; - when he throws himself together (ātmatmiya) at the lotus-like feet of the Supreme Person; - when the darkness concealing his innermost self is dispelled by the grace of the Supreme Person, who supremely compassionate as he is, is pleased with the uninterrupted acts of worship that are dictated by the devotee's bhakti in glorification, remembrance, salutation, mortification, exaltation, the listening to the descriptions of His perfections and narrating them himself, meditation, adoration, and prostration, etc.; - then will he be able to attain the Supreme

Person by virtue of his bhakti, which takes on the form of contemplation in the highest degree of lucid perception, directed to none but Him, uninterrupted, pre-eminent and held preciousy dear.¹

On the basis of the above citations and the discussion, we conclude that Rāmanuja's mokṣa scheme follows a sequence of first karma yoga and bhakti yoga, based on knowledge gained from scripture and assisted by the development of certain spiritual qualities. Thus, for one who is desirous of release, the steps to be taken toward the attainment of release may be presented in the following order:

Step 1: The development of the spiritual qualities such as sāma (tranquility) and dama (self-restraint), etc. This lends support to the proper performance of karma and to meditation.

Step 2: The acquisition of right knowledge from the scripture with the help of a guru.

Step 3: Meditation (dhyāna): the purpose of which is to generate devotion (bhakti); this results first in a vision of the individual ātman, and second, due to devotion which arises from this vision, in meditation on the Supreme Person, which has the form of reflection on his attributes. Such

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Vedārthasaṅgraha, trans. Van Buitenen, para. 91, pp. 248-49: "soāyam parabrahmabhūtaḥ puruṣottamo niratisaya puṇyasamcayakṣināśeṣa janmopacita pāparāśeh parama puruṣa caranāravinda śaraṇāgatijanita tadābhi mukhyasya sadācāryepadesopabṛṃhita śāstrādhigata tattvayathā-tmyavabodha pūrva kāharaha rūpacīyamāna samadamopltah saucakṣamārjava bhayābhayasthana viveka dayāhimsādyātma gunopetasya varnāśramocita parama puruṣāradhanaveśa nitya naimittika karmopasamhṛti niṣiddha pariḥāra niṣṭhasya...parama puruṣa caranāravinda yugaḷa...tadbhakti-kāritānavarata śṛuti smṛti namaskṛti vandana yatana kirtana guṇa śravaṇa vacana dhyāna arcana pranāmādiprīta parama kāruṇika puruṣottama prasāda vidhvastasvāntadhyāntasyānanya prayojana anavarata niratisaya prīya...dhyāna rūpa bhaktyekalabhya."

meditation, engaged in daily until death, promotes ever greater devotion to the Supreme Person.

It is very clear that Rāmānuja has recognized a very close connection between all dharmas. In fact, karmayoga, jñānayoga, and bhakti yoga are not separate roads, but successive stages of the same way culminating in the attainment of God.

Karmayoga is a necessary factor for the awakening of bhakti in an individual. Knowledge is not antagonistic to action, on the contrary, it is an important ingredient of disinterested action (niṣkāma karma), and both are inclusive.² One is able to practice karmayoga by dis-associating his self entirely from the egocentric desires and this happens to him only with the aid of self-knowledge.

Bhakti, as we see in the mokṣa scheme of Rāmānuja, is not a mere path of emotion devoid of knowledge, but a special category of knowledge that fills the heart of an individual soul with a deep feeling of attachment for the Supreme Person. Considered in this sense, bhakti functions as a means to release. Later, the Sri-Vaiṣṇava theologians clearly distinguished bhakti as the means to mokṣa by the term sādhana bhakti from bhakti as the goal of religious life by the term phala bhakti. This distinction, however, is not found in Rāmānuja's own works. A French scholar, Professor Olivier Lacombe, suggests that bhakti is also synonymous with the culmination and the goal with what is known as sākṣātkāra (immediate perception) of the essence

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Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, translated by Sampatkumaran, op. cit., IV. 33, p. 136: "In karma (i.e., karma yoga), which has a dual aspect, the element consisting of knowledge is superior to the element consisting of material objects."

of Brahman, which means not only an intellectual but an affective participation in Brahman.³ But bhakti is sometimes considered by the author of the gādyas as the goal of the religious life, as well as the means to that goal, and he moves easily back and forth from one usage to the other. It is just such fluidity in terminology that we find in the gādyas.⁴ The gādyas are considered by Śrīvaiṣṇavas to be a part of their stōtra literature, and there is little doubt that their author intended them as stōtras, whether that author was Rāmānuja or one of his early followers. It is felt by many scholars⁵ that there is a fundamental difference of theological conception between the major works of Rāmānuja (Śrībhāṣya, Gitābhāṣya, and

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Olivier Lacombe, L'Absolu selon le Vedānta, les notions de Brahman et d'Atman dans les systems de Cankara et Ramanuja (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Gauthner, 1966), p. 363. "Le premier souci de notre docteur est ici de montrer que la sagesse ou la connaissance dont parle l'Écriture n'est pas autre chose que la méditation pieuse et recueil lie et que si elle doit culminer dans une intuition de l'essence du brahman, intuition que est une participation a la fois intellectuelle et affective a son object."

4

See Śaraṇa gati gadyam, 1-23.

5

Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 28. "On the whole, I may say that there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that Rāmānuja's attitude with regard to man's personal efforts in securing his lofty end is different from this displayed in the Śrībhāṣya. Whenever God's grace is mentioned, the personal efforts of the aspirant are stressed too. There is certainly no trace of that importance given to prapatti by later Viśiṣṭādvaitins. God's grace may crown the aspirant's efforts, but he first has to deserve it. Only when a man has devoted his life to exclusive bhakti towards God will He elect him to his beatitude." Also see Van Buitenen, Vedārthasaṃgraha, op. cit., p. 32. Robert Lester, Rāmānuja and Sri Vaiṣṇavism, the Concept of Prapatti or Saranagati, History of Religions (An international journal for comparative historical studies, University of Chicago, 1965-66), pp. 269-70: "In sharp contrast to Rāmānuja's commentaries, the 'Saranagatigadya' is a dialogue, praise, and petition eliciting grace to salvation first between the author and Nārāyaṇa himself. The devotee begins by taking refuge with Śrī (śaraṇam aham prapadye) asking that she might mediate between him and Nārāyaṇa."

Vedārthasamgraha) and the Gadya-traya. It is certain that Rāmānuja did not see prapatti as an alternative mokṣopāya independent of bhakti, which we will demonstrate in this chapter. But gadyas, on the contrary, presents only prapatti as a means of release. This over-emphasis on prapatti as a separate path to mokṣa is not in line with Rāmānuja's theology as we see in his commentaries. The phrase 'parabhakti para-jñānaparamabhakti'⁶ appears seven times in the gadya as a standard formulation of the means to the highest goal.⁷ It is not found anywhere in his commentaries. The idea of mokṣa being an eternal service rather than eternal worship and contemplation is foreign to Rāmānuja's genuine works, but occurs in the gadyas.⁸ Therefore, we have reason to regard the gadyas as later works ascribed to Rāmānuja in order to secure the authority of his name for this novel and unorthodox teaching. If we closely examine the history of the Indian religious tradition, we will come across numerous instances which prove the fact that the disciples often propagate their own teachings in the name of their respective teachers. Thus many devotional hymns are attributed to Śankara.

⁶ Saranagatigadyam, 2; 15; 16; three times in 17; 20.

⁷ Robert Lester, op. cit., p. 279.

⁸ Saranagatigadyam, 16: "paramabhakti parajñāna paramabhakti kṛta paripurṇa navarata nitya viśadata ananya prayojana anavadhikā-tisaya priya bhagavad anubhavo aham. tathāvidha bhagavad anubhava janita anavadhikā-tisaya prīti kārīta aśeṣa avesthe citāśeṣaśeṣatai karati rūpanitya kiṅkara bhavati."

See also 19 and 20.

Rāmanuja developed a very sophisticated theological system based fundamentally on the teachings of the Upaniṣads. But the Gadyatraya describes prapatti as a mere path of emotion which, indeed, is not true of Rāmanuja's thought. He was trying to interpret bhakti as a superior category of knowledge. It could be argued that Rāmanuja, being a disciple of Yāmunācārya,⁹ might have extolled saranāgati, or 'prapatti', in the gadyas and kept them in secret from the public in order to maintain the esoteric character of the teachings. But we will present a few arguments against that possibility.

First of all, the primary purpose of writing a commentary is to explain the true purport of the scripture to one's own disciples or followers. Therefore, if Rāmanuja wanted to teach the doctrine of prapatti, he would have introduced it in his great works, for he was not in favour of holding the religious truth away from the public as a secret message exclusively for a selected group.¹⁰

Secondly, Rāmanuja was confronted with two extreme religious expressions. One was the absolute monism based primarily on a subtle philosophy, and the other was the bhakti cult of the Ālvārs, founded on religious feeling alone. He attacked the Śankara school vehemently and ignored the path of extreme emotion in order to build a new religious system according to the need of the time. In this noble

9

Yāmunācārya extols 'prapatti' in his 'Stotraratna', 47: "Fie upon me, the impure, immodest, cruel, shameless creature, for lustful though I am, I am praying, O Supreme Lord, for the position of your servant." Stotraratna, trans. Swamī Ādidevānanda (Mylapore: Srī Ramakrishna Math, 1951), p. 57.

10

Yāmunācārya, M., Rāmanuja's Teachings in His own Words (Bombay: Bhāratiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963), pp. 18-19. Rāmanuja received the secret mantra from his guru, but he propagated this message, without any restrictions of caste or colour, to all.

attempt, he selected a middle path in which he could accommodate knowledge, volition, and emotion. In other words, his historical background was such that he did not feel the need of emphasizing the concept of prāpatti.

The notions of the all-sufficiency of divine grace and the insufficiency of the human soul are the major underlying principles of the concept of prāpatti. Rāmānuja is convinced of the significant role of divine grace in liberation. It is an important contention in Rāmānuja's theology that Īsvara cannot be known unless he reveals himself. God reveals himself to the chosen, who is the dearest one (priyatama).¹¹ Rāmānuja says that it is God who takes the initiative, rather strives hard, so that his dearest one attains himself.¹² But Rāmānuja states unequivocally that one will be chosen only if one has devoted one's life to exclusive bhakti towards the Lord. In this connection, he quotes the Bhagavadgītā, the words of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna: "For those constantly devoted to me and desirous of an eternal union with me, I give the faculty of understanding by which they come to me."¹³ He explicates this verse in support of his position and says that one who possesses the memory (upāsana), which is inexpressibly dear itself, and inexpressible love towards the object of that memory

¹¹ Srībhāṣya, I.i.1, para. 15: "priyatama eva hi variniyo bhavati."

¹²

Ibid.: "yathayam priyatama ātmānam prāpnoti tatha svayameva bhagavan prayatata." This is the only place where Rāmānuja uses the analogy of the lover and the beloved (priyatama). Lord is presented here as a lover who is anxiously waiting and 'striving hard' for the union with his beloved. The mādhurya aspect of the relationship has only an insignificant place in Rāmānuja's thought.

¹³

Bhagavadgītā, X.10.

(Lord), is fit to be chosen by the Lord.

In the generations after Rāmanuja, there was a widening split between two groups of his followers regarding the understanding of divine grace and human response to grace. The later theologians of the two schools reflect their theological differences in their definition of the various divine attributes through which grace is expressed.

The northern (Vadagalai) school held that there were two separate ways to salvation. According to this school, Rāmanuja advocated mainly bhaktiyoga. This was a discipline of devotion which included within itself the preliminary disciplines of right action and right knowledge, of the nature of one's self, the world and above all, God. Rāmanuja considered bhakti to be synonymous with the meditation (upāsana or dhyāna) which is taught in the Upanisads. That, to him, was remembrance of God which is as constant and uninterrupted as a flow of oil; it is meditation done in a spirit of utter devotion to God. Because of its difficulty and because of the conditions that restricted it to members of the three higher castes, there were very few who would be able to follow this difficult path to salvation. Fortunately, God had provided a second and easier path. This is prapatti, also called śaranagati, going to the Lord as one's sole refuge. In the belief of this school, God's grace is necessary, even to successfully follow the path of bhakti. To follow this second path, however, one relies completely on divine grace. There is, indeed, a sort of minimum requirement for those who follow this second path: that is the act of surrender itself. God requires this much human response if he is to bestow his grace.

The southern (Tengalai) school, on the other hand, insisted that there is only one way to salvation. This is the way of prapatti. Not only is man incapable of following the path of discipline, but it is an affront to God and his gracious nature even to attempt it, relying, even in the slightest, on one's own capacity. The formal act of surrender in the initiation ceremony is therefore not seen by this second school as meeting a divine requirement. It is simply the open acknowledgement of a state of human dependence on God which is essential reality. As men should acknowledge their essential nature as utterly dependent on the Lord their master and owner, so they may also express their confidence in this formal act of surrender that the Lord is obligated to protect his servants, especially when they confess their own helplessness and turn to him as their only refuge.

Both of these schools maintain the necessity and the priority of divine grace in accomplishing man's salvation, but they differ in the degree of human action and human responsibility which is compatible with the primary divine grace. This difference is made clear in the respective nicknames of the two schools, viz., markata-nyaya (monkey theory) and mārjāra-nyaya (cat theory). The first school accepts the analogy of the mother monkey and her young. The baby monkey is carried about by its mother, but it must hang on itself. The second school, on the other hand, insists that man's dependence on God must be far more complete than this; man is like the baby kitten which is carried by its mother without the kitten's doing anything to cooperate.

Both of these schools have misinterpreted, though they claim that they have faithfully explicated, the teachings of their common

teacher Rāmānuja. The southern school particularly, being attracted to the path of emotion, has gone far away from the original teachings of Rāmānuja. As a result of this deviation in later Viśiṣṭādvaita, people quite erroneously often associate Rāmānuja's bhakti doctrine with the path of emotion.

Now we will turn to the most important issues: whether Rāmānuja's own conception of divine grace agrees with the 'cat-hold' or the 'monkey-hold' view of divine action or with neither. How does he reconcile the apparent opposition of divine justice and divine mercy?

It is certain that Rāmānuja did not see prapatti as an alternative mokṣopāya independent of bhakti. It is equally definite that the actions of 'taking refuge in' or 'resorting to' the Lord is essential to the mokṣopāya. Twice in the Vedārthasaṁgraha it is explicitly stated. "The release of the soul from the samsāra, in its close association with prakṛti which is the result of karman and composed of various guṇas, is not possible without resorting to the Lord."¹⁴ Rāmānuja's two alternative interpretations of the chief prapatti text in the Bhagavadgītā, 18.66, called carama śloka (the last word), are not used by Vedāntā Deśika to support the doctrine of prapatti as he understood it,¹⁵ because they do

14

Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 81, p. 118: "karmakṛta vicitra guṇa maya prakṛti samsarga rūpat samsārān mokṣo bhagavat prapattimantarena nā upapadyata."

15

Vedāntā Deśika, Srīmad Rahasya Traya Sāra, trans. M. R. Rajagopala Ayyangar (Kumbakonam: Agnihothram Ramanuja Thathachariar, no date (1956?)), pp. 563-64. Vedānta Deśika gives the summary of the meaning of the carama śloka. He says: "Your knowledge is limited; your ability is insignificant; your life is short and you are also impatient of delay. Therefore, do not go about seeking other upāyas which you cannot fully understand, which you cannot easily adopt and which you can bear fruit only after much delay. Realize that I who am easy to access to all, who am the saviour of all the worlds, and who am endowed with all the attributes essential for a saviour, am the only upāya and perform the surrender of the responsibility of protecting your self to me with its five angas when you have adopted this

not clearly state that 'surrender' is an alternative path to salvation from that of devotion (bhakti). Rāmānuja's two interpretations¹⁶ of 'carama śloka', however, which reveal his understanding of surrender, are different from that of his followers. Here we will quote the carama śloka and then focus attention on Rāmānuja's interpretation of it:

Abandoning all duties
Go to me as thy sole refuge;
From all evils I thee
Shall rescue: be not grieved.¹⁷

In his first interpretation,¹⁸ Rāmānuja takes 'all dharmas' to mean all the paths to mokṣa previously taught: karmayoga, jñāna yoga, and bhakti-yoga, but does not take parityājya (abandoning) literally. These yogas or disciplines are not to be abandoned, but to be performed as worship

15 (Con't.)

upāya you will have done what you ought to do, you will become my ward....I will find delight in making you render all forms of service in all places."

16

Bharatan Kumarappa, The Hindu Conception of Deity as Culminating in Rāmānuja (London: Luzac & Co., 1934), p. 309: gives only one interpretation. See Van Buitenen's interesting comment in his Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 27.

17

The Bhagavadgītā, trans. F. Edgerton (New York: Harper and Torch Publishers, 1964), p. 90.

18

Karma yoga jñānayoga bhaktiyoga rūpeṇa sarvān dharmān parama nissreyasa sadhana bhūtan madārāadhanatvena atimātra prītyā yathādhikāram kurvāṇa evoktariya phala karma kartṛtvādi parityāgena parityājya mām. ekameva kartāramārādhyam prāpyamupāyam cānusandhatsva.

'Performing, according to ability, with intense love, and as worship of me, all dharmas which have the form of karma yoga, jñānayoga, and bhaktiyoga and which are the means to supreme felicity, renouncing by giving up the fruit, the action, the doership, etc., in the manner heretofore stated, reflect on me alone.'

pleasing to God, and entirely in the spirit of love, in a manner accordant with the devotee's own position in society and spiritual qualifications.¹⁹ Those things which should be abandoned are: the karmic fruit of such actions, the idea that the actions are one's own, and the idea that one is their real author. Correspondingly, adopting the Lord as one's sole refuge means that one recognizes that he is both the actor and the one worshipped through the action, and he is both the goal (upeya) and the means (upāya). If the Lord is thus worshipped, he will deliver the devotee from the accumulated sins which prevent him from reaching him.

In his second and alternative interpretation,²⁰ Rāmaṇuja interprets 'dharmas' to mean expiatory ceremonies to remove sins. Since there is an infinite weight of such sins, since the ceremonies designed to remove them are also countless and difficult to perform, and since life is short, the Lord counsels Arjuna not to practise such expiatory rites, but asks him instead to take refuge in him, and assures him that he will remove the sins which prevent Arjuna from undertaking

¹⁹ This is what Sankara has designated by the term 'adhikaribheda'.

²⁰ bhaktiyogārambhavīrodhyānādikāla samcitanānavidhā
nantapāpānugunān....prāyaścittarūpan....sarvān dharmān parityajya
bhaktiyogārambhāsiddhaye māmekam saraṇam prapadyasva aham tvā sarva
pāpēbhyo yathoditasva rūpabhaktyārambhavīrodhibhyas sarvebhyah
pāpēbhyo mokṣayisyāmi.....

Renouncing all dharmas which have the form of expiations with regard to the infinite and various kinds of sins accumulated during beginningless time which are obstacles to the commencement of bhaktiyoga resort to me alone as refuge in order to effect the bhaktiyoga; I will release you from all sins, sins which are obstacles to the commencement of bhakti which has the essential nature described.

bhaktiyoga.

Vedānta Desika²¹ comments that only a hint of the deeper meaning of this verse, which according to him is the doctrine of prapatti, is given by Rāmānuja here. Rāmānuja himself is not so clear about it. The hint that Vedānta Desika speaks about is contained in the second interpretation presented above, for it shows that just as a man may give up expiatory ceremonies and surrender to the Lord in order to be able to begin bhaktiyoga, so one who considers that he cannot perform bhaktiyoga at all may give up bhakti, jñāna, and karma, and may surrender to the Lord in order to attain him directly, i.e., to secure mokṣa.

Now, to revert to the first interpretation, Rāmānuja follows the summary of the meaning of the 18th chapter of the Gītā, given in Śloka 22 of Yamuna's Gītārthasamgraha.²² All through the Gītābhāṣya, Rāmānuja has been emphasizing this point, but here he extends it from its initial application to ritual action (karma) to include all human efforts to attain salvation. All of these forms of worship should continue, he insists, but it is only in a secondary sense that they are a means to salvation. Saranagati or prapatti is, here, not an alternative way to bhakti, as it is interpenetrated by other dharmas

21

Vedānta Desika, Srīmad Reḥasya traya sāra, p. 512.

22

Yāmuna's Gītārthasamgraha, 22: "The last lecture deals with the knowledge in virtue of which all agency is attributed to God, and of the necessity of cultivating sattva, sets forth how personal acts develop (into the attainment of God) and concludes by stating the fundamental doctrine of the Bhagavadgītā."

which the carama śloka says may be abandoned. This is certainly a long way from the later understanding of prapatti as a particular cultic act by means of which one's salvation is assured. It is even further away from the later practice of having prapatti done on behalf of a disciple by the guru²³ or the later doctrine that it had already been performed on one's behalf by Rāmānuja. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly provides a basis for these later developments, for Rāmānuja has radically extended and deepened the teaching of the Bhagavadgītā in such a way as to relativize (though not to make any the less necessary) all human religious effort as a means of gaining salvation. Once it is recognized that it is fundamentally God who accomplishes man's salvation, the joys of the mystical communion and humble service, which might previously have been considered part of the human path to reach God, are understood to be part of the divine estate into which the devotee enters by the grace of God.²⁴

23

Vedānta Desika, Srīmad Rahasyatraya sāra, p. 96: "In the case of those who depend solely on the ācārya, there is no doubt at all concerning the fruition of prapatti by the principle of 'how much more then' (kaimutika nyāya)".

24

Ibid.: "When the author of the Srībhāṣya performed prapatti (the surrender of his responsibility or bhāra) we too have been saved (by that act) owing to our intimate connection with him." This is interpreted in two different ways by the southern school and the northern school. The former holds that since Śrī Rāmānuja has already performed prapatti, even his followers of a later day who acknowledge him as their ācārya will be benefitted by it and they need not perform prapatti; the latter hold, on the other hand, that only those who were his śiṣyas then would be benefitted by it.

"Supreme devotion" and 'service'²⁵ are all dependent on the metaphysical subservience of the soul to the Lord; its śeṣatva. This same connection is made in Rāmaṇuja's comment on the verse just before the carama śloka. The Lord is now going to speak his final word to Arjuna concerning the bhaktiyoga. Rāmaṇuja interprets the verse previous to it to mean that Arjuna is instructed to practise that continuous representation or calling to mind which is synonymous with knowledge, worship, and meditation, which is a contemplation most dear to the worshipper. The worship which is pleasing to God is the performance of the entire round of services which are incumbent on a śeṣa; that is, which a liege or serf should perform for his master or owner. Here the entire life of devotion is interpreted, not, as sometimes in Rāmaṇuja's writings, as particular actions which please the Lord and elicit an appropriate reward, but as that which is in accordance with one's essential nature, which is both one's duty and one's joy.

In the thought of Rāmaṇuja, God seems to have two somewhat different relationships to man's religious activities. In the first relationship, he presides over the working of the law of karma. Here he does not interfere with the moral decisions and the religious activities (or absence of such activities) on the part of the finite self. Only in certain exceptional cases does he cause individuals to perform good or bad actions, and this is only when the individuals already have

25

These are called 'parabhakti' and 'seva' in the Vedārthasamgraha; see Van Buitenen; op. cit., pp. 196, 250, 299.

strong dispositions in one direction or another, so that the Lord's encouraging them to go further in the direction they have already chosen is only a special means of rewarding unusual goodness, or punishing incorrigible evil-mindedness and evil doing. Apart from this special case, the Lord simply gives permission or approval (anumati) for souls, whom he has endowed with the power to act and the capacity to discriminate between good and evil, to perform whichever course they themselves desire. God's second relationship to man's moral and religious action is quite different from the first. Here, he actively intervenes, both in the life of the individual and in the affairs of the world as a whole. He manifests himself in the empirical universe, or, in other terms, descends periodically from his perfect and eternal realm of bliss to the constantly changing world filled with misery or at best only limited happiness.

There is not, in Rāmānuja's mind, any contradiction between the first relationship of the law of karma and the second relationship of grace (prasāda), but there is, however, a clear distinction. Indeed, Rāmānuja's followers found it difficult to completely reconcile the two, precisely because of the prominence which Rāmānuja gave to the second relationship, in which God intervenes in the affairs of the world. Before turning to the second mode of divine activity, we should note some aspects of Rāmānuja's conception of God's presiding over the working of the law of karma, since this is for him the indispensable presupposition of everything he says about God's protective and redemptive action towards those who worship him.

First of all, Rāmānuja makes it clear that the power for future

effects present in good and bad actions is not a mysterious power immanent in the cosmos, which the followers of Karma Mīmāṃsā called apūrva. "Apūrva is a metaphysical link between work and its result."²⁶ The Mīmāṃsā do not see any point in tracing the results of actions to the Lord's will.²⁷ Sankara, on the contrary, maintains that God is only an impartial judge who counts the merits and demerits according to the deeds of the individual.

We say that he has a regard for the merit or demerit of persons. Surely it is no fault of the Lord, that his bringing about of such unequal creation is due to the regard he has for the merit and demerit of the beings about to be created. The Lord should rather be looked upon to be like 'rain'. Just as rain is the general cause which makes rice and barley grow, while the different potentialities inherent in their seeds, are the cause of the disparity between such rice and barley, even so in the creation of Gods and man, etc.²⁸

Rāmānuja does not have any serious objection in accepting the Advaita position with regard to the law of karma,²⁹ but he has added one more dimension to it. Rāmānuja criticizes the Mīmāṃsā theory of apūrva which by itself is non-sentient cannot energize a sentient being.³⁰ So Rāmānuja maintains that it is the Lord alone that vouchsafes fruits of actions.³¹ The work which pleases God and thus causes him to grant

26

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 421.

27

Sankara, Brahma Sūtra, trans. V. M. Apte, III.ii.40, p. 616.

28

Ibid., II.i.34, p. 340.

29

Rāmānuja, Sribhāṣya, II.i.34.

30

Ibid., III.ii.37.

31

Ibid., III.ii.40.

appropriate rewards are primarily acts of worship, i.e., sacrifices and other religious duties which are prescribed in the Vedas or other sacred scriptures. Though the Vedic sacrifices are directed to the deities to whom the Vedic hymns are addressed, they are all actually enjoyed by God himself, since he is the inner self of all these deities.³²

In these respects, there is no essential difference between ordinary religious works and the higher forms of meditation and devotion. Both works and meditation achieve their results by pleasing the Supreme Person, who alone is the one who bestows all the goals of human desire: pleasure in this life, attainment of the lower and transitory heaven after death, and the attainment of permanent bliss by being liberated from the bond of karma which keeps one in an endless cycle of rebirths. The difference lies in the end in which a man wishes to reach by his religious act. Meditation or devotion to the Supreme Person is usually undertaken in order to secure man's supreme goal of release from this transient and painful world. However, rites enjoined by the scriptures and even forms of worship which are ordinarily performed to gain some worldly benefit, may help in winning the favour of God, which will bring permanent salvation, provided that they have been done without any desire to earn merit to be used for worldly results.³³

32

Rāmānuja, Srībhāṣya, III.ii.40.

33

Ibid., III.ii.37: "sa eva hi sarvajñas sarva śaktir maha udāro yāgad anahomādibhi upāsanena cārādhitā eihikāmuṣmikabhoga jātāṃ sva svarūpāvāpti rūpamapavarga ca dātumīṣṭe; nahya cetanaṃ karma kṣaṇadhvaṃsi kālantarabhāviphala sādhanāṃ bhavitumarhati."

"For it is He only - the all knowing, all powerful, supremely generous one - who being pleased by sacrifices, gifts, offerings and the like, as well as by pious meditation, is in a position to bestow the different forms of enjoyment in this and the heavenly world, and release which consists in attaining to a nature like his own. For action (karma)

Meditation, like action, achieves its effect only by winning the divine favour or grace, but it is distinguished in this respect, it can so please the Lord that it nullifies his displeasure at the mass of sins accumulated by the soul in an endless series of lives. The effect of the Lord's displeasure is his condemning the soul to ignorance of its true nature and destiny and his causing it to identify itself with its material body and the worldly pleasures experienced through that body. When the Lord's displeasure at accumulated sin is nullified by his delight in the meditation and devotion of the worshipper, he destroys the ignorance he has caused and grants the soul knowledge of its own nature and of himself. Such knowledge leads to the attainment of God and, at the cessation of this life or some future life, to the attainment of communion with the Supreme Person and release from the bondage of samsara.

Rāmaṇuja gives the following analogy to show how the Supreme Person rewards his devotees:

It is also observed in the human society that men earn wealth in various ways by doing different kinds of jobs, such as farming, and by means of wealth they pay homage to the king, either directly or through his assistants. When the king has thus been honoured, he bestows rewards appropriate for each gift.

Rāmaṇuja goes on to say that sacrifices, gifts, and oblations are indirect aids towards propitiating the Supreme Person, while praise, worship, and

33 (Con't.)

which is non-intelligent and transitory is incapable of bringing about a result connected with a future time." See Gītābhāṣya, trans. Sampatkumaran, op. cit., XVI.19: "The meaning is that I alone link them to cruel minds which are the cause of their activities leading to the attainment by each of them of his particular embodiment." Ibid., XVIII.46.

meditation propitiate him directly. When propitiated (offered pleasing worship, āradhita), God, like a king, bestows appropriate rewards, viz., temporal happiness and final release.³⁴ This is a very significant analogy, for it makes it appear that God's relation to men is comparable to that of a king who bestows his favour on his subjects in proportion to the value of their gifts and services to him. This suggests something very important about the nature of God and also about man's motivation in serving God: he serves God in order to win God's favour and receive his blessing in return.

This theme of pleasing God in order to win his favour certainly runs throughout Rāmaṇuja's theology, and it is sometimes taken as so characteristic of his thought as to set him apart from his followers, who more and more stressed the unconditional or uncaused character of divine grace (niḥhetuka kṛpā). However, we have already seen that there is another line of thought which runs through all of Rāmaṇuja's writings, though it is less prominent in his Commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras than in his other works. This other thought also has its human analogy in the relation between a king and his subject, or perhaps more accurately, between the head of a household and his servant or slave. This is the 'śeṣa-śeṣi' relationship which we have already discussed in the third chapter. In this relationship, the service of the slave to his master is not done in order to win some favour, it is done simply

³⁴ Sribhāṣya, III.ii.40: "loke ca kṛṣṇādibhirvicitra rūpan dravya veśeṣān sampādyataih. rājānam bhṛtyadvāreṇa sāksāt arcayanti arcitas ca rājā tattadarcanānugūṇam phalam prayacchan dṛśyate."

as his duty. As this relationship applies to God and the soul, this is a joyful duty, so that subservience and service to God is man's real happiness.

Rāmānuja's followers have stressed that God's relation to the soul is also quite different from that of the ruler who bestows his favour according to the merit of his followers. It is the proper function of the master or owner to take care of his servants, and this is all the more true when the servant has acknowledged his inability to care for himself and his utter dependence upon his master. Rāmānuja himself never suggests that God 'must' save man or even that he certainly will, by virtue of his nature, for to say this would be to limit God's complete lordship and supremacy. Since God is the master and owner (seṣi) of all his creatures, it is quite fitting that he should protect and save them, but there is no question of any responsibility or necessity forcing him to do so. He is compelled to save men only by his own supreme compassion (paramakārunya). Such divine mercy does not imply for Rāmānuja that God must abandon his strict justice and his treatment of men according to their moral deserts. He deals with this point specifically in the Sribhāṣya in refuting the charge of 'mercilessness' in God's creating the world in which there is suffering. He defines 'mercy' (dayā) as "a disinterested concern in the welfare of others, which is incapable of enduring their suffering". Mercy which causes one to transgress the law in order to help someone else is not a virtue, but a weakness. The Lord's mercy is certainly not such a weakness. The Lord is always endeavouring to increase superlative (niratisaya) happiness,

and in order to do this he must subdue the accumulated mass of sins and check the tendency of creatures to disobey his laws.³⁵

Sribhaṣya, II.2.3.

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF MUKTI

A radical transformation takes place while an individual soul goes through different stages of spiritual life with the aid of spiritual disciplines such as karma, jñāna, and bhakti. Finally, he will attain liberation, which means the sense of fulness that comes to the individual in his perfected state of being. Dr. K. C. Varadacari summarizes the possible transformation which could occur in the nature of a soul:

From the level of conscious recognition of his own fundamental unity enriched by the complex structure of his experience, the individual looks far ahead to that grandest of all structures the final perfection which he recognizes to lie only in the personality which is real, embracing all the lesser personalities, whilst granting them value and individuality in the promise of the divine birth in mystic consciousness when the individual feels himself as one with the divine or at one with the entire cosmos as in pantheistic mysticism. Mystico religious man finding himself to be inseparable from the divine life is transformed completely into true personality.¹

This interpretation of Rāmanuja's theology of the Inner Ruler and the redemptive act of the Lord within the soul is tinted with a shade of pantheistic mysticism. But, in fact, the eternal presence of the Lord within the soul and the enrichment of the disciplined soul by the grace of the highest are important themes in Rāmanuja's thought. The deep penetration of the divine within the individual soul will make him

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Varadacari, op. cit., pp. 156-57.

conscious of the infinite within him, around him, everywhere, and for all time. In the Bhāgavadgītābhāṣya, Rāmānuja describes a relationship between God and the people who are exclusively devoted to him, the highest class among all his devotees. They are called the wise (jñānis) or the great-souled ones (mahātmas). These yogis are as superior to other yogis as Mount Meru is to a handful of mustard seeds.² The devotion of others to the Lord is only in order to please him and thus to gain their own ends, but the exclusive object of the jñānis' devotion is the Lord himself. "The jñānis love for me is so great that I cannot express it. Even such love have I, for him."³ These jñānis are also described as those who have no other object or desire, for their sole object necessary to sustain their souls is meditation on God himself.⁴ These supreme devotees worship God from the sheer joy of experiencing him in devotion and also with the consciousness that they are his śeṣas and they are therefore obligated to render unto him all that a servant should do for his master.

From the side of the devotee, this relationship with God is one of utter dependence and reliance on God for support. There is, in the first place, the intellectual realization that all intelligent and material entities, in all conditions whatsoever, are dependent on the Supreme Person with respect to their essential nature, existence, and activity (svarūpa-sthiti-pravṛtti). The highest kind of devotee applies

² Rāmānuja, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, VI.47.

³ Ibid., VII.17.

⁴ Ibid., IX.22.

this knowledge also to himself:

One will rarely meet a person in this world who after many virtuous lives has come to know that it is his sole essence to be sēsa of God and that his own proper form, existence, and activity depend on God who is the supreme one on account of his innumerable auspicious qualities.⁵

The devotee's sense of dependence, however, goes far beyond the recognition of God as the universal ground and Lord, or, the support of which he feels in need is the experience of the presence of God. The jñāni is one of the very few whose nature is such that "his happiness is only when in union with me, and his grief only when separated from me."⁶ The superior yogi has an intense desire to find God and to remain in communion with him. This yearning love is so intense that this yogi is unable to tolerate a moment's separation from God.

Now the paravidya or the knowledge of the most high is praised. It is said that superior to the yogins of all kinds is that yogin of whom God will now proceed to speak. Compared to this yogin, all yogins who resort to austerities, etc., are as inferior as mustard seeds compared to the Meru. God considers that this superior yogin is he who has fixed his manas on God because his excessive love of God adding something to his nature that others lack, he cannot find any support but God, who strives diligently to attain God because his love is too ardent to allow him to be, if not for a single moment, separated from God and who worships God through bhakti.

5

Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 104: "avāsane vāsudevaśeṣataikarasa aham tadāyatta svarupa sthiti pravṛtti ca sa asamkhyevai kalyāṇagunaiḥ." Harikrishna Das Goyandaka, Rāmānuja Bhasya Hindi anuvada saṁhita (Gorakpur: Gita Press), p. 246.

6

Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 106.

7

Van Buitenen, op. cit., p. 98. Harikrishna Das Goyandaka, op. cit., p. 225.

Also, it is said:

He is so attached to me and he loves me so dearly that it would imperil his existence to be separated from me, even for a moment, or to stop thinking from my essential nature, qualities, actions, or glorious realms.⁸

It is said of the mahātmas that "because of their intense love, without me their souls cannot be supported".⁹ The same idea is brought out in the definition of exclusive devotion in the Bhagavadgītā, IX.13:

But it is me son of Prthā,
that great souled men,
Abiding in god-like nature,
Rever with unswerving thoughts,
Knowing (me as) the beginning of beings, the imperishable.¹⁰

In the comment on the following verse, this communion is interpreted as continual worship. "Because of their intense love for me, they discover that it is impossible to support their souls (ātma-dhāranamdothamāna) for even an infinitesimal part of a moment without being engaged in singing my names, or in holy exercises, or in obeisance of me."¹¹

According to Rāmanuja, these jñānis, although they are wholly devoted to the Lord and always engaged in the religious worship of him, cannot be completely liberated unless the body falls off.

Jīvanmukti

To the Sankarites, the saint who, after realizing the true nature

8

Goyandaka, op. cit., p. 225.

9

Ibid., p. 270.

10

Bhagavadgītā, trans. Franklin Edgerton, p. 47.

11

Goyandaka, op. cit., p. 294.

of ātman, shakes off all sense of difference and is free from the characteristic qualities of the transmigratory order is jīvanmukta.¹² The Śankarites could show that there are numerous passages in the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā which teach that the realized soul can transgress all oppositions and the snares of samsāra. The Īsavāsyopaniṣad, referring to this state of the soul, asks: "When for the jñāni all bhutas have become ātman itself, then how can there be any sorrow or infatuation for him who sees the one pure ātman in everything?"¹³ The same idea is expressed in the Kāthopaniṣad,¹⁴ when it is said that when the wise man realizes the great all-pervasive ātman which causes the appearance and the cognition of the objects of the dream and the waking states, he is not subjected to any sorrow. The Bhagavadgītā devotes as many as seven ślokas¹⁵ for describing the behaviour of the sthitaprajña soul, the sum and substance of which lies in communicating the idea that the realized soul becomes free from all evil influences of samsāra, such as attachment, infatuation, sorrow, anger, etc. He can completely control his sense organs and free his mind from passions and desires. He can fix his mind always on God and thus enjoy tranquility and serenity within him. This state, according to Rāmaṇuja, is the highest state that a soul can attain in this world. So Rāmaṇuja does not consider this state as liberation in the true sense of the term. This state of sthitaprajña, as it is

12

'Free while living' would be an appropriate English equivalent to the term 'jīvanmukta'.

13

Īsavāsyopaniṣad, 7.

14

Kātha Upaniṣad, II.i.4.

15

Bhagavadgītā, II.2; II.55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 65.

described in the Upanisads and the Bhagavadgītā, gives only an assurance to the jīvātman about its own release at the final stage of this worldly life.

Rāmānuja, criticizing the concept of jīvanmukti, which in his estimate is only a self-contradictory term, remarks:

It may be said that it is release resulting (to the self) even in the embodied condition, but then such a statement will be self-contradictory in meaning, like the statement - "my mother is barren".¹⁶

Rāmānuja refutes the notion of jīvanmukti, using the Advaitin's own logic: "To be embodied is to be in bondage, and that to become unembodied is to obtain release."¹⁷ If this statement is true, how could the Advaitin say that one can attain release while one is still in bondage? Another legitimate question arises here with regard to the concept of jīvanmukti. If mukti is the annihilation of ajñāna, the material cause of all phenomena, how can the jīvanmukta continue to possess a physical organism?

The Advaitins tried to resolve this difficulty by contending that the prārabdha-karma¹⁸ is responsible for the delay in the destruction of the physical body after the avidyā has been dispelled by the light of right knowledge. Sankara says in the Vivekacūdamāni:

The prārabdha-karma of the wise man is decidedly stronger. Its destruction is possible only through its experience. Besides the accumulated (sañcita) and the future karmas can be destroyed by the fire

¹⁶ Srībhāṣya, I.i.4.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The effect of the actions that have begun to fructify, however, continues to operate even after realization.

of the right knowledge of truth.¹⁹

This explanation does not satisfy many modern scholars; for instance, Umesha Misra finds difficulty with this interpretation and, therefore, he maintains that prārabdha-karma is also ineffective after the achievement of knowledge. He remarks:

It is to be noted here that the Bhagavadgītā uses the words - 'edhāmsi' and 'karmāṇi in plural (Gītā, IV.37), thereby it means that all the three divisions of karman become ineffective simultaneously as a result of the jñāna. If it be so, then simultaneously with the realization of the 'knowledge' the present body which is the result of the 'prārabdha-karma' must also fall down as dead. It will be then very difficult to explain the state of jīvanmukti....It is perhaps because of this difficulty that almost all the commentators of the Bhagavadgītā exclude prārabdha-karma and explain the work 'karmaṇi' as referring to two karmas only.²⁰

Thus he puts forward a new suggestion in order to reconcile the above. He thinks that the prārabdha karma-phala, in the forms of pleasure and pain, becomes ineffective after the jñāna has manifested itself; that is, the person who has realized the jñāna remains unaffected by the feelings of pleasure and pain.²¹ In this sense, Umesha Misra explains that not only kriyamāna and sañcita, but also prārabdha-karma are ineffective. According to Rāmānuja, the destruction of the accumulated and future karmas take place in the state of sthitaprajña. But freedom from these karmas does not lead to the total destruction of the bondage. Rāmānuja quotes the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad in order to substantiate his

¹⁹, Sankara, Vivekacūdamani, 474.

²⁰ Umesha Misra, A Critical Study of the Bhagavadgītā (Allahabad: Tirabhukti Publications, 1954), p. 34.

²¹ Ibid., p. 25.

statement: "When all desires which once entered his heart are undone, then does the mortal become immortal, then he obtains Brahman".²² He interprets it thus: "This does not mean such immortality as would imply complete destruction of the state of bondage."²³ Since mukti cannot be attained unless the bondage is totally destroyed, which will never occur while the soul is caged in the body. Hence, Rāmānuja says that the mukti, in the true sense of the term, can be attained only after death.

Post-Sāṅkarites made attempts to answer this question by offering two different theories. The first theory is that the samskāras of past experiences are responsible for the continuance of the body of the jīvanmukta. The second theory maintains that the existence of residual avidyā (avidyāleśa) is the cause of the jīvanmukta's body. But these theories could not satisfy the rivals of the Advaita school. The coexistence of avidyā with release fails to appeal to reason and it also conflicts with śruti. If avidyā is destroyed completely at the rise of true knowledge, how does the residual avidyā remain? A. C. Das, in one of his recent articles, points out the loopholes of the Advaita arguments with regard to the concept of jīvanmukti. He remarks:

If Brahman alone is real and the world is unreal, we have to say that the knowledge or realization of Brahman must destroy ignorance, which is the knowledge of the world, as light destroys

22

The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, IV.iv.7, quoted in Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmānuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, IV.ii.7, p. 731.

23

Ibid., IV.ii.12, p. 733.

darkness. Prārabdha is pertinent only in the pre-nirvikalpaka stages. But it is hard to see how the question of prārabdha can arise when the sādhaka has attained identity with Brahman. Strictly the argument of prārabdhā is not a new one; it is nothing but the argument of the residuum of ignorance in another form. On analysis, the one resolves into the other.²⁴

Sankara simply evades this problem by contending that the doctrine of karma, as an answer to this problem, is only to satisfy the unintelligent people.²⁵ In reality, from the absolute point of view, there is neither any accumulated, future or prārabdha-karma. Professor Suryanārāyana Sastri, in order to defend the Advaitic position, remarks: "It is an ancient prejudice that release is inconsistent with embodiment; it is true only in so far as embodiment means the conceit that the body is the self. When that conceit is gone, the persistence of the body is of no moment."²⁶ But he, however, admits that "the co-existence of māyā with release cannot be avoided at least by those Advaita schools which admit a plurality of jīvas".²⁷ He has nothing new to offer in order to solve the problem, but is just repeating what Sankara and his disciples had taught. He says: "There is only one mukti; there is no propriety in calling it jīvanmukti since there is nothing else to contrast it with, and the dissolution of the body is neither an

24

A. C. Das, Studies in Philosophy (Calcutta: Firma Mukopadhaya, 1962), p. 44.

25

Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, 463.

26

Ed., T. M. P. Mahadevan, Collected Papers of Professor S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri (Madras: University of Madras, 1961), p. 250.

27

Ibid., p. 247.

inevitable pre-condition nor an integral feature of mukti."²⁸

Rāmānuja could not accept jīvanmukti as true liberation. He quotes the Chāndogya Upaniṣad: "So long as he is not freed (from the body), so long as there is delay; then he will be blessed".²⁹ The purport of the text, he says, is "that in the case of him who observes the form of worship known as sadvidyā, final release stands in need of only the falling off of his body, and thus it prohibits the release even while in this life".³⁰ Therefore, Rāmānuja emphatically states that the release which has the nature of the removal of all distinctions does not result for one who is alive.

Now let us make an attempt to get a clear picture of the nature of the liberated soul as it is depicted in the Viśiṣṭādvaita school. The liberated soul does not actually merge in Brahman, but keeps its identity and enjoys perpetually a bliss of communion with God. Rāmānuja quite often uses the analogy of the relation between body and soul in order to indicate the inseparable association between the jīvatman and paramātman, but at the same time he is well aware of the fact that they are distinct, though the body and the soul are treated identical in language. The Advaitin, who maintains complete identity between the individual soul and the universal soul, finds fault with this point of view of Rāmānuja's, which is neither advaita nor dvaita. This problem will be discussed a little later.

28

Ibid., p. 251

29.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI.xiv.2, quoted in Srībhāṣya, I.i.4.

30

Srībhāṣya, I.i.4.

Rāmānuja vehemently criticizes the Advaita notion of mukti which is a merger into Brahman. Release would be purposeless if it were merely a return to Brahman's homogeneous Being or the causal substance. Rāmānuja remarks: "Release, understood in this sense (the Advaita sense: merging into Brahman), would not be anything beneficial to the individual soul, because to be refunded into Brahman as an earthen pot is refunded into clay means nothing else but complete destruction."³¹ But individuality, according to Śāṅkara, is only aupādhika, and is ultimately lost in the state of mukti. When all is Brahman, Śāṅkara says: Why should the jīva retain its jīva-hood? Rāmānuja does not agree with Śāṅkara on this point. Therefore, he clearly and emphatically articulates his conviction with regard to the nature of the liberated soul: the individual soul retains its individuality and manifests its essential nature even in the state of mukti. The religious training which Rāmānuja received from the Vaiṣṇava ācāryas influenced him very much in reaching such a conclusion.

The search for release posits the permanence of what is sought; this seems inconsistent with production or attainment, what is produced is finite, is perishable, release therefore must be a manifestation of the ever-existent and infinite. So Rāmānuja says:

When therefore at the moment of release those essential qualities assert themselves, the case is one of the manifestation of what already exists.... Thus knowledge and other attributes of the self are only manifested through the putting off of evil qualities; they are not produced, for they

31 ,
Sribhāṣya, I.iv.21.

are eternal.³²

The soul should have all good characteristics for its essential nature, and that release should consist in the full manifestation of these perfections serves to show that in release the soul becomes most truly itself. Release, Rāmanuja emphasizes, is for its self-realization, not self-annihilation. Varadacari's definition of liberation is worth noting in this context: "Liberation is the sense of fullness that comes to the individual." He adds: "The souls may be even divinized by the conscious (or super-conscious) grace of the Lord; they may assume the form and body of the supermaterial nature, but they can never be more liberated than they are, that is they are related in a dependent relation of the body to the divine."³³ This interpretation might create some confusion in the mind of the reader, since on the previous page we discussed that Rāmanuja tried to show that the nature of the liberated soul is not newly attained, but only the manifestation of what already exists, and we also pointed out the philosophical reason behind his arguments. But we noticed Varadacari's interpretation of liberation as a kind of transformation of the human to the divine by the grace of the Lord, which we criticized in the early part of the chapter. But this idea of transformation we see in Rāmanuja's commentary on the Bhagavadgita, where he quotes the Viṣṇu

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Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmanuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, IV.iv.3, p. 758; and also see Ibid., IV.iv.1, p. 755 where Rāmanuja quotes the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VIII.xii.3: "Thus does that serene being, having risen from the body and having approached the highest light, manifest itself in its own form."

33

K. C. Varadacari, Srī Rāmanuja's Theory of Knowledge, p. 150.

purāna:

O sage, that Brahman, by his own power, makes this worshipper, who is deserving of a change of state for the better, acquire his own nature in the same way in which a magnet makes the metal acquire its own magnetic character.³⁴

In fact, Rāmānuja's exegesis of this passage does not contradict his previous statement. The problem can be solved by the proper interpretation of his exegesis. We maintain that when Rāmānuja uses the analogy of the magnet and the metal, actually he does not mean that the magnet imparts all of its nature to the metal, but certainly he wanted to show that it undergoes certain changes. In the case of a soul, which is under the spell of samsāra, the change is the removal of ignorance and sin by knowledge. In other words, when the grace of the Lord shines upon the soul it will realize its real nature, for the grace is the source of knowledge. Thus the soul which is enlightened will take steps to reach its real nature, which, according to Rāmānuja, is perfect. The nature of the liberated soul is similar to that of the Lord, and both have risen beyond the guṇas.

Now we will take up the issue again of whether the individual soul is identical with Brahman. Rāmānuja, with the aid of śruti and smṛti, shows that the liberated soul is not identical with Brahman.

He quotes the Viṣṇu Pūraṇa, II.xiv.27:

If it be held that the identity of the highest self with the individual self is the highest

34

Rāmānuja, Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, XIV.2; also see the Vedānta Sūtras with the Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānujacarya, trans. M. Rangacharya and M. B. Varadaraja Aiyangar (Madras: The Educational Publishing Co., 1961), Vol. I, p. 131.

truth, it is wrong, because any substance which is different from another cannot indeed acquire the character of that other substance.³⁵

Although the soul retains individuality in release and remains a distinct self, its individuality is not, according to Rāmanuja, such as to annul the supremacy of Brahman and to reduce him to one among a number of equally independent selves.

Rāmanuja, however, grants infinity of knowledge to the liberated soul. Dharma-bhūtajnāna, the functional consciousness, which had been in a contracted state during the soul's bondage, expands to the fullest ideal condition upon liberation.³⁶ The liberated soul can enjoy all the worlds of divine manifestation³⁷ without any hindrance, as easily and fully as God himself.³⁸ The soul gains the fullest plenitude of auspicious existence. Freed from all karma, he enjoys all the excellent characteristics of the Lord himself, except one, that is the power of creation of the worlds.³⁹ The released soul obtains whatever it wishes and even sees its friends and relatives by its mere will.⁴⁰ It

35

Srībhāṣya, I.i.1, trans. Rangacarya, op. cit., p. 131.

36

K. C. Varadacari, op. cit., p. 152.

37

Unchanging and eternal nityā vibhuti and the world of līlā are the two divine worlds.

38

Srībhāṣya, I.i.1. Rāmanuja quotes Dramīḍa bhāṣya: "On account of close association with the deity, he who is devoid of the body (released soul) may become capable of enjoying all desirable objects like the deity himself". (trans. Rangacarya, p. 132) Rāmanuja also quotes Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VIII.i.6: "Those who depart from here, after having known the self and also his eternal and auspicious qualities, for them there is free movement in all worlds".

39

Srībhāṣya, IV.iv.20.

40

Ibid., IV.iv.8.

can enter into anybody.⁴¹ All liberated souls are equal without any distinctions of rank and caste.⁴² Above all, the liberated soul gets the unique privilege of the vision of pāramātmān, which is even unthinkable to an ignorant soul. "The highest Brahman which is free from all change and of an absolutely perfect and blessed nature - this, together with the manifestations of its glory, is what forms the object of consciousness for the released soul."⁴³

The structure of Vaikuntha, the city of Viṣṇu, is vividly described in the Gadyas,⁴⁴ which is only an imagination of one of Rāmānuja's disciples. Anyhow, the description of Vaikuntha is not our main concern here; therefore, we will turn our attention to another issue, viz., the underlying organic unity behind God, the soul and matter which, Rāmānuja thought, would be the solution to the problem of multiplicity. The individual, according to Rāmānuja, is the combination of the divine spirit (antaryāmin), the soul, the knowing subject (cit), and the material body (acit).⁴⁵ "Individual seems to be a trinity in unity."⁴⁶ Rāmānuja finds that the unity which can hold multiplicity within itself must be significant, enfolding the multiplicity in a unique manner. The unity will be affected by the bondage

41

Ibid., IV.iv.15.

42

Ibid., IV.iv.22.

43

Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmānuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, IV.iv.19, p. 768.

44

The Vaikuntha Gadya, the second section of the Gadyatraya describes the charming city of Viṣṇu.

45

Sribhāṣya, I.i.13.

46

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 719.

of the individual soul, but when the soul regains its essential nature and thus release, the unity will be a unique one. All liberated souls live in Vaikuṅṭha in harmony as (a community) a body of which the soul is God. The body depends on the soul for it cannot sustain itself, whereas the soul is independent, yet it likes the body as an attribute. Rāmaṅja is trying to show the perfect and inseparable unity between the paramātman and the jīvatman by using the analogy of soul and body as well as viśeṣya and viśeṣana.

The liberated soul will not come back to samsāra. Like all other acāryas of Vedānta, Rāmaṅja assures that there is no danger of falling into samsāra (bondage) once the soul is liberated. This is the promise of the Upaniṣadic thought and the Bhagavadgītā.⁴⁷ The Lord, being perfect and loving, will not allow the devotee whom he has redeemed and whom he dearly loves to ever again suffer the miseries of samsāra.

We know from scripture that there is a supreme person whose nature is absolutely bliss and goodness, who is fundamentally antagonistic to all evil....who is all knowing, who by his mere thought and will accomplishes all his purposes, who is an ocean of kindness as it were for all who depend on him, who is all merciful....and with equal certainty we know from scripture that this supreme Lord, when pleased by the faithful worship of his devotees...frees them from the influence of Nescience which consists of karman accumulated in the infinite progress of time and hence hard to overcome, allows them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of his own nature, and after that does not turn them back into the miseries of samsāra.⁴⁸

47

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VIII.15; Bhagavadgītā, VIII.15-16.

48

Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmaṅja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, IV.iv.22, p. 770.

The non-return of the soul to samsāra is not only the will of the Lord alone, but the desire of the soul as well. Rāmaṇuja states very clearly that the soul, having once attained release, never wishes to return to samsāra. "As, moreover, the released soul has freed itself from the bondage of karman, has its powers of knowledge fully developed and has all its being in the supremely blissful intuition of the highest Brahman, it evidently cannot desire anything else nor enter on any other form of activity, and the idea of returning into the samsāra therefore is altogether excluded."⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

The discussion in the foregoing chapters centered around the concept of mokṣa as explicated in Rāmaṇuja's religious system in general and his unique interpretation of bhakti in particular.

Sankara's idea of mokṣa is that it is not a matter of acquisition, but is a question of self-realization. In other words, release is possible only through knowledge which will dawn at the destruction of avidyā. So the Advaitins often underestimate the status and role of bhakti in the scheme of release, and most of them give it a very equivocal place.¹ Sankara himself does not directly refute bhakti, but he does so indirectly. Knowledge, for him, is the only means to release and his polemical energy was not directed towards refuting bhakti, but karma. Thus, in his Commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, he rejects the conjoining of knowledge with works (jñāna-karma samuccaya) as also with anything else as means of mokṣa. Also, the path of knowledge is for the highest class of aspirants, while the path of works (under which much else is subsumed) is for the lower class of aspirants.² Further, instead of rejecting bhakti - the occasion for which did not offer itself

¹ Cf. Sankara writes: "tasmāt Gītā śāstre kevalādeva tatvajñānānat mokṣa prāptiḥ, na karma samuncitādi niscito'rthaha." Therefore, the conclusion of the Bhagavadgītā is that mokṣa is through knowledge alone, not by the conjoining of with works and so on. Gitābhāṣya, II.10. See also XVIII.66.

² Yathacopapāditaṃ avidvatviṣayamkarma vidvadviṣayāca...jñānaniṣṭhā; Gitābhāṣya, XVIII.66.

to Sankara - he absorbs it into jñāna and makes it one of the preparations for the attainment of the latter. Bhaktiyoga, a central theme of the Gīta, he clearly interprets in that fashion; bhakti, therefore, means, for him, devotion to knowledge and Īsvāra himself is a great and powerful symbol that helps in the single-minded striving for knowledge.³

According to most Advaitins, bhakti is intended for a lower class of aspirants while jñāna is advocated for the highest class.⁴ The author of the Kalpatāru explains that the making known of the Brahman with attributes is out of compassion for those dull-witted persons who have not the capacity to intuit the Supreme Brahman without attributes.⁵

This evaluation of the Advaitins could be true with certain popular religious movements, as we mentioned in the fourth chapter, but one cannot generalize it and apply it to all theological systems which

3
Mam ca Īsvaram Nārāyaṇam sarvabhūta hṛdayāśṛtam yo yatih karmān
va avyabhicāreṇa na kadacit yo vyabhicarati bhaktiyogena bhajanam bhaktih
saiva yogasthena bhaktiyogena sevate. sat guṇām samatityaitetanyathoktān
brahmabhūyaya, bhajanam bhūyo, brahmabhūyaya brahmabhavanāya mokṣāya
kalpate bhavati ityarthah. - A yati or karmin who serves me - Īsvāra,
Nārāyaṇa - dwelling in the heart of all beings with a never failing
bhaktiyoga in devotion to knowledge - which bhaktiyoga is the result of
the Lord's grace and mercy, such a one transcends the three guṇas and
becomes fit to be Brahman, that is to attain mokṣa. Gitābhāṣya, XIV.26.

4
Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgītā, pp. 61-62.

5
Quoted in Radhakrishnan, Brahma Sūtra, p. 127: "nirviśeṣam
param brahma sāksāt kartum anīśvarāḥ ye mandās te' nukampyante
savīśeṣanirūpaṇaiḥ vasīkṛte manasy eṣām saguna-brahma-śīlanāt. tad
evāvirbhavet sāksā abhedopādhi-kalpanam."

advocate bhakti. The early bhakti schools were not based on philosophical principles, but primarily on the religious feelings of ordinary human beings. According to Śāṇḍilya, bhakti is an affection fixed on God.⁶ The term prīti indicates the affection which is inseparably connected with happiness. Likewise, the Nārada Sūtra points out that the earnest desire and selfless love (parama prema)⁷ of the devotee for the Lord is the principal factor in bhakti. Such interpretations of the term bhakti explicitly show the emotional characteristic of the pre-Rāmānujite bhakti movements. The Ālvārs, the saints of south India, also preached a simple religion of devotion. They are well known for their ecstatic expression of religion. Singing and dancing were employed to express the ecstatic emotion which awakened a sense of God's presence in them. The Ālvārs describe different types of relationships between the Lord and the worshipper; the emotions that stirred them are mainly of the relation between the master and the servant, father and son, friend and friend, and, above all, lover and beloved. The Ālvārs have given undue importance to the last mentioned type of relationship. Dasgupta vividly describes the intensity of their emotional expressions, which are, in other words, known as their religious experiences.

The ardent longing is sometimes expressed in terms of a pitiable pathological symptoms due to love-sickness, sometimes by sending messengers, spending the whole night in expectation of the Lord, and sometimes in the expressions of ravishing joy felt

6
The Aphorisms of Śāṇḍilya, trans. E. B. Cowell, I.1.2., pp.

6-7.

7
Nārada Sūtra, 276.

by the seemingly actual embrace of the Lord.⁸

Such emotional expressions are also designated by the term bhakti. Therefore, the Advaita allegation is not altogether baseless, because the early theistic schools, as we pointed out, are not founded on religious philosophy, but on the religious feelings and the term bhakti, as it is expressed by them, is not a philosophic category but the designation for a certain type of feeling.

Bharatan Kumarappa, in his book, The Hindu Conception of Deity as Culminating in Rāmanuja, levelled a criticism against the exegetical principles of Rāmanuja. He thinks that Rāmanuja interprets scripture for his own purposes.⁹ However, all the Vedānta ācāryas, it may be said, are subject to this criticism, because Śankara, Mādhva, Vallabha, and many others interpreted the scripture as they understood the revelation. To return to Kumarappa's accusation, let us examine Rāmanuja's commentary on the Bhagavadgītā and the Brahma Sūtra. Rāmanuja, as he interprets the Bhagavadgītā, seems to be concerned to objectively understand the purpose of the author, which is to reconcile religion with philosophy, or yoga with sāṅkya. In fact, with regard to his Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, there are many scholars who seem impressed that he

8

Dasgupta, S., A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol.III, p. 83.

9

Bharatan Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 162: "Reason in the case of Rāmanuja is not bound by any hard and fast dogma, which it is its sole task to defend. Indeed, so free does Rāmanuja feel in the employment of reason, that he at times employs reason, not to support to scripture, but to make scripture support him."

is more faithful to the text than Sankara.¹⁰

Kumarappa's second accusation is that Rāmanuja's arguments are purely textual and not philosophical,¹¹ which is akin to the criticism of the Advaita. So we will treat them together by examining the arguments of Rāmanuja in order to see whether this accusation has any bearing.

Rāmanuja explicates bhakti in a new fashion: his bhakti corresponds to the upāsanas and is not a boundless love for God as the word is commonly understood. Bhakti, from his point of view, is based on knowledge. Like all other ācāryas of Vedānta, Rāmanuja is also convinced of the fact that the knowledge of God is not obtained through empirical reasoning, but only through scripture.¹² Reasoning may be employed in support of scripture, but mere understanding of scripture is inadequate for the emergence of sākṣātkāra which is, however, not a logical knowledge. Dr. John Arapura deals with this problem in one of his articles. Śruti (revelation), according to him, is an Archimedian point outside of reason.¹³ He remarks:

¹⁰ Vedānta Sūtras with Rāmanuja's Commentary, trans. George Thibaut, p. xx. P. M. Modi, A Critique of the Brahma Sūtra, Part I, p. 3.

¹¹ Bharatan Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 163.

¹² Śrībhāṣya, I.i.3: "sastram tasya yoni karanam pramanam tat sastra yoni'. tasya bhava: sastrayonitvam tasmāt Brāhma jñāna karanatvat sastrasya tad yonitvam brahmaṇo atyantatindriya tvena pratyakṣādi pramānāviṣayatayā brahmaṇa sāstraika pramānatvādūka svarūpam brahma."

¹³ John G. Arapura, "Language and Knowledge", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXV, No. 2 (1970), p. 162.

In the presence of revelation reason recognizes its truth-emptiness; it interiorizes revelation while resisting every one of its own immanent possibilities that go counter to the truth. Truth-emptiness is a very positive thing; it is the phenomenal receptacle for the transcendently originated truth. When reason envelops truth, there arises understanding (vijñāna), which is a pre-condition for the disappearance of reason and the emergence of knowledge (jñāna). In this way, reason finds itself internally related to revelation, while the latter is neither internally, nor externally related to the former.¹⁴

This description of the role of revelation and its relation to reason adequately represents the school of Viśiṣṭādvaita too. Rāmānuja maintains that the understanding of scripture is one of the pre-conditions of sākṣātkara, but by doing so he magnifies the scope of meditation, which he believes is the only means to the knowledge.¹⁵ This direct knowledge of Brahman, according to Rāmānuja, is synonymous with bhakti.¹⁶ Rāmānuja, therefore, asserts that bhakti is a mode of knowledge. Van Buitenen also points out Rāmānuja's application of bhakti as an intellectual enterprise with the spirit of devotion. He says:

Bhakti, as a man's participating of God, is at once 'intellectual and devotional'. It is the constant rememorization of the ātman's total subservience to God, inspired and animated by a perfect love of worship in which the knowledge of God as the possessor of all-perfections, as the merciful saviour and as the soul, cause of the universe completely terminates.¹⁷

It has been established by Rāmānuja that the true knowledge of the individual soul and the Supreme Person is an important ingredient of bhakti, which is the only means of release. Release, as we discussed

14 Ibid., p. 163.

15, Sribhāṣya, III.ii.23.

16 Ibid., I.i.4.

17

Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā, p. 22.

in the previous chapter, is the sense of fulness that comes to the individual in his perfected state of being and in which an individual soul will enjoy the highest freedom. According to Rāmanuja, the individual soul is essentially characterized by knowledge and bliss.¹⁸ The bondage is mainly due to karman.¹⁹ In fact, all Vedānta ācāryas will agree with Rāmanuja on this issue, although they use different terms to denote bondage.²⁰ Again, like Śankara, Rāmanuja says that when the bondage is removed the soul can only be defined as essentially knowledge, and he adds that this nature is common to all souls.²¹ Karman is the cause of obscuration, which is not intrinsic to the proper form of the soul. When the differentiations are removed, the obscuration is also lost.²² In other words, the knowledge which is a proper form of the soul is contracted by karman. As a result of this contraction, the soul identifies itself with a body.²³ The individual soul is always seeking a universal content, even in the limited horizon of its being. But this universal knowledge is possible, from the point of view of Rāmanuja, only when the soul becomes pure, which it does on

18

Vedārthasaṅgraha, para. 5: "jīvatmane svarūpaṁ deva manusyādi prakṛti pariṇāma viśeṣa rūpa nānavidha bheda rahitam jñāna ānandaikaguṇam."

19

Ibid.

20

According to Śankara, bondage is mainly due to avidyā, which includes karma.

21

Ibid.; "jñāna svarūpa-nityetāvadeva nirdesyam tacca sarveṣām-ātmanam samanam."

22

Vedārthasaṅgraha, 5.

23

Ibid., 43: "atmakam tva vidyārūpeṇa karmanā svarūpa nitya dharma bhūta prakāśaḥ samkucitaḥ. tena devādi svarūpa ātmābhīmāno bhavatīti viśeṣa."

attaining release from its karmic body. For it is its karma that diminishes its knowledge. But when it is liberated, what happens is, according to Rāmanuja, the dharmābhūtajñāna (the functional consciousness), which had been in a contracted state during the soul's bondage, expands to its fullest ideal condition of the universal expansion.²⁴ When the individual can have the fullest and the most complete vision of reality as the goal, he has reached the pinnacle of knowledge. Those who wait at the door of the mokṣa, therefore, are called jñānis because they have gained this superior knowledge of the Supreme Person by their intensive bhakti. Contrary to the notion of Kumarappa, these arguments of Rāmanuja's are philosophical in the sense that they maintain logical consistency and they are adequately supported by the texts. Rāmanuja, however, explicates mokṣa as a state of knowledge and bliss, unlike the popular notion of heaven with all kinds of pleasures. But Rāmanuja's theory is often misinterpreted by the scholars of the Advaita tradition. As a concrete example, Radhakrishnan writes:

Rāmanuja's beautiful stories of the other world, which he narrates with the confidence of one who had personally assisted at the origination of the world, carry no conviction.²⁵

²⁴ Śrībhāṣya, II.iii.18: "idṛśa jñāna saṁkoca vikāsa karatat tad dehe sambhandha viyoga abhiprāyaḥ."

²⁵ Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 720. Radhakrishnan does not give any reference, probably he might have come across many unorthodox teachings in the Gadyas. It is unfair on the part of Radhakrishnan to criticize Rāmanuja, without investigating the problem of the authorship of the Gadyas, for somebody's illogical and unconvincing narration of heaven.

Rāmanuja elevates bhakti from a lower estate, with dubious associations with the life of mere feeling, to that of knowledge, and fixed it firmly in the framework of the Vedānta. Van Buitenen designates this noble effort of Rāmanuja's as the 'Vedanticization of Vaiṣṇava bhakti'.²⁶ Rāmanuja writes the Srībhāṣya exclusively from the point of view of orthodox Vedānta, but he justifies the theology of the Pañcarātra system in such a smooth way as to widen the scope of bhakti. This methodology is even accepted by many scholars of the middle ages. For instance, Madhusūdana Saraswati, a fifteenth century Advaita scholar,²⁷ does not condemn bhakti in the light of its history before Rāmanuja, but, on the contrary, assimilates it into his version of Advaitism. This could be interpreted as having been due to the influence of Rāmanuja.²⁸ However, we find striking similarities between the notion of bhakti in Rāmanuja's thought and that of Madhusūdana. Firstly, both of these scholars give an important place to bhakti while maintaining the orthodox Vedāntic tradition. Secondly, the concept of bhakti as a mental activity based

26

Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), ed. Milton Singer, p. 30.

27

It is a debatable point. See Sanjukta Gupta, Studies in the Philosophy of Madhusūdana Saraswati (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bandar, 1966), pp. i-v.

28

According to tradition, a grand disciple of Rāmanuja, namely Rāmananda, who lived about the end of the fourteenth century, left south India and lived in Benerese, where he gathered a following around himself. See Nicol Macnicol, Indian Theism (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), p. 115. This grand disciple of Rāmanuja had influenced the intelligentsia of the north. So it is possible that Madhusūdana might have come across Rāmanuja's teachings through Rāmananda.

on the reflection of consciousness is common to both. Like Rāmanuja, Madhusūdana has equated bhakti with cittavṛtti,²⁹ and he maintains bhakti as a special type of knowledge.³⁰ He expands the scope of bhakti by enumerating eleven stages of it.³¹ He not only taught bhakti, but practiced it throughout his life. T. K. Venkateswaran describes the religious experience of Madhusūdana in the following manner:

Madhusūdana's experience, which occurred on a very 'high level' and after life long scholarship, and sophistication, shows how such simple reductions are based upon either a sense of hubris in scholarship or lack of comprehension of the complexity and the paradoxical nature of the issue. His experience reveals the dialectical and paradoxical tension in which his mind lived, between the qualityless, transcendent, impersonal brahman, on the one hand, and the particular, concrete, quality-flooded person Krishna on the other.... What we have to note here, however, is that there is move, a return to bhakti, but at a high level. It is from bhakti to jnāna and back.³²

Venkateswaran thus points out a kind of back and forth movement in

29

Sanjukta Gupta, op. cit., p. 204.

30

Ibid., p. 205.

31

Quoted in Sanjukta Gupta, op. cit., p. 211:

Prathamam mahatam seva
 taddaya - pātratā tataḥ
 śraddhātha teṣam dharmeṣu
 tato hariguṇa srutiḥ
 tato ratyaṃ kurotpattiḥ
 svarūpadhigatistataḥ
 Prema Vṛddhi paramānande
 tasyātha sfuraṇam tataḥ
 Bhagavad dharmaniṣṭhātāḥ
 svasmims tat guṇa śālitā
 Premno¹ tha paramā kāṣṭhetyudita
 bhakti bhumika.

32

Milton Singer (Ed.), Krishna, Myths, Rites, and Attitudes, p. 150.

Madhusūdana's religious life. But Gupta, however, disagrees with Venkateswaran and he maintains that Madhusūdana experiences 'sāyujya' (sākṣātkāra) while keeping jñāna and bhakti in conformity.³³

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, one of the greatest intellectuals of medieval India, maintained knowledge and bhakti together almost in the same fashion as that of Rāmānuja's theological system. So we cannot but say that Rāmānuja's theological system penetrated even into its rival schools.

Professor Suryanarayana Sastri has given due respect to the path of bhakti. In fact, he belonged to the Advaita school, but he sees no justification for the traditional Advaita theory of mokṣa; release is impossible without the destruction of avidyā. According to him, the "Advaitin emphasis on knowledge as the sole means to realization has been due to (i) an intellectual bias, perhaps due to the fact that metaphysics was the special pursuit of the Sannyāsins who had finished with their duty to society, (ii) a defective psychology compartmentalizing cognition, conation and emotion, (iii) possibly an escapist mentality engendered by conditions of life in general on the one side and excessive ritualism on the other."³⁴

33

Gupta Sanjukta, op. cit., pp. 216-17. Also see Sūryanārayana Sastri's comment; T. M. P. Mahadevan, Collected Papers of Professor S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri, p. 72.

34

T. M. P. Mahadevan (Ed.), Collected Papers of Professor S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri, p. 242.

In one of his articles, Sastri vehemently criticizes the Advaita's attitude towards bhakti and he justifies the bhaktiyoga. He remarks:

Realization is not the monopoly of any class nor of any mode. It may come through spiritual analysis or through the melting of the heart in devotion and through self surrender in service....Bharatitirtha, in the fourteenth century, indicated the possibility of realization through meditation on the nirguna, instead of Vedānta enquiry....Of a piece with Bharatitirtha's teaching is Madhusūdana's doctrine of bhakti as a mode of realization. In the case of Madhusūdana, however, the intellectual virus has been active. We are not merely told that what is realized through bhakti is conditional, but we seem to be aware all the time of a struggle between intellectual loyalty to the unconditioned and the emotional loyalty to the conditioned. And all these because of an ancient prejudice against the emotions and the will.³⁵

Here Professor Sastri points out numerous cases where staunch Advaitins hold bhakti and jñāna together in order to reach the final goal. Bhakti, therefore, from his point of view, is not antagonistic to jñāna, on the contrary, it is a complementary element.

Rāmaṇuja's contribution to the field of theology, particularly his new interpretation of bhakti, has made a tremendous change in various theistic movements of Hinduism. Vaiṣṇavism is strengthened by the religious ideas of Rāmaṇuja and thereby acquires a higher intellectual altitude. The religious reformation which we can trace in the succeeding centuries throughout the country was undoubtedly due in large measure to the new prestige that Rāmaṇuja brought to the religion of bhakti by linking it to the orthodox Vedāntic tradition.

The bhakti which Jñānesvar³⁶ preached does not consist primarily in emotion, but is a synthesis of intellect and passion. The intensity of the passion is much less than that which we find in the movement of the Ālvārs or even the later teacher Caitanya. Tukarām, Tulsidas, Kabīr, Nānak, and many others were inspired by the theology of Rāmanuja, but in reality none of them could practice the religion which Rāmanuja taught. He is devoted to the Supreme Person, Nārāyaṇa, who is the source of man's being. In his thought, he retains the idea of the Universal Being as his spiritual goal. But some of the later bhakti teachers and poets who propagated popular Vaiṣṇava bhakti were satisfied with the devotion to Rāmā or Kṛṣṇa.

The later bhakti saints and singers were by and large prone to emotional religious expressions without the benefit of the discipline of the philosophic thought that Rāmanuja had so sternly inculcated. What in brief was Rāmanuja's unique philosophical and theological achievement? In one word, it may be designated: jñāna-bhakti-samuccaya. Bhakti and jñāna had remained separate; not only were they separate, but bhakti was a very mean thing in the eyes of the philosophers, good for the lowly and the illiterate but not good enough for the learned. Rāmanuja brought them together and integrated them in a way that had not been done since the time of the Bhagavadgītā. He not only integrated the two, but brought about a real coincidence between these contraries. The greatness of his achievement consists in the fact that he used all

36

A Marata Brahmin and thinker who lived in the late fourteenth century. He is the author of Jñānesvāri, a commentary on the Bhagavadgītā.

the resources that the scholastics customarily used, the prasthanātrayī and the pramāna śāstra, with skill and vigor. He spared no logic and no rhetoric in the process; naturally like the other ācāryas before and after him, he was also a supreme polemicist and he drove home his point with irony and often sarcasm.

There is indeed a close affinity between Rāmānuja's thought and the Bhagavadgītā itself. Like him, the Gītā was, above all, concerned to integrate two contrary principles, sāṅkhya and yoga (perhaps jñāna and bhakti), and Rāmānuja built on that foundation and built well. But his work was not carried on by his followers, and Rāmānuja surely would not have been comfortable before some of the excessive expressions of bhakti of later days, and it is unfortunate that historically and theologically his name came to be associated with them.

No doubt Rāmānuja was the fountainhead of many movements of bhakti after him, but often there is a tendency to read him in the light of some of the extravagant developments of bhakti, which it must be argued is wrong. The perspective maintained in this study has been to alter the process; that is to say, to put Rāmānuja back in the light of the Vedānta and even the Advaita - taking that constituent in the compound 'Viśiṣṭādvaita' seriously - and to see him from that end.

We may parenthetically, and by way of appendix, try to sample a couple of modern Western Christian responses to Rāmānuja's theology. It is important, because Rāmānuja, as against Sankara, has been a great favorite with many Christians because of his stress on the personality of God and such other things that seem to bring him closer to Christianity than Sankara.

First we take Nicol Macnicol, a Christian scholar of the early twentieth century, who believed that Indian theism compared very well with Christian theism. In his estimate, Rāmanuja's system is an intellectualism and, therefore, antagonistic to theism.³⁷ This criticism, while not correct, brings home a point, viz., that some people saw Rāmanuja as a jñāni. He remarks:

Rāmanuja defines bhakti as 'only a particular kind of knowledge of which one is infinitely fond and which leads to the extinction of all other interests and desires'. In Rāmanuja's system and in the Gītā, we may say that, while ethical and spiritual ideas have been imported into this conception of knowledge that brings release, the intellectual element is still predominant and determinative. This religion still, like the religion of the Upaniṣads, while it is a theism, is a gnosticism, a speculation, making its primary appeal to the logical understanding. It is something that, unlike Christianity, is rather revealed to the wise and prudent than to babes.³⁸

According to Macnicol, real theism should have an atmosphere of devotion saturated with emotion. "'Feeling', in comparison with sluggish reason, is a powerful moral dynamic, and as such it must have a great place in an ethical theism."³⁹ So, in his view, "There is far greater hope, indeed of the blossoming of a genuinely theistic faith in the atmosphere of the fervent devotion of the bhakti cults than in the chill air of Upaniṣad speculation."⁴⁰ It seems that Macnicol has a special fascination for the path of emotion. But Rāmanuja has given enough room for feelings (emotion) in his theological system, which Macnicol himself

37

Nicol Macnicol, Indian Theism, p. 245.

38

Ibid., p. 243.

39

Ibid., p. 248.

40

Ibid., p. 248.

admits in the same book, and he says:

It is the moral and emotional warmth that pervades all his doctrines that gives the system of Rāmānuja much of its power and of its distinction.... In harmony with the emphasis he lays upon the grace of God is the doctrine of incarnations which he adopts into his system.⁴¹

In another book, Macnicol defines bhakti as a 'loving devotion' and says that in any theistic religion such an attitude to God as the word 'bhakti' implies would naturally be assumed by worshippers when their emotions were stirred.⁴² He explains that this definition of bhakti is applicable to Rāmānuja's system. However, this shows the inconsistency of Macnicol's treatment of Rāmānuja. He estimates Rāmānuja's treatises in one place as highly logical and, therefore, a kind of gnosticism; in the same book at another place, he comments that Rāmānuja's religious system is distinctly marked by moral and emotional warmth.⁴³ Macnicol lists three essential characteristics which should be found in any theism: first, belief in God as a spiritual being; second, a faith that his power is sufficient at the last to secure that the good will conquer; and third, a conception that the relationship between God and his worshippers is moral.⁴⁴ These three characteristics could be found in Rāmānuja's religion. Therefore, Macnicol may call it a theism, but he does not designate it as a full-grown theism, because only a religion which maintains the characteristics

41

Ibid., p. 109.

42

Nicol Macnicol, The Living Religions of the Indian People (London: Student Christian Movement, 1934), p. 74.

43

Nicol Macnicol, Indian Theism, p. 109.

44

Ibid., p. 7.

of Christianity⁴⁵ deserves this unique designation. This indicates the weakness of his methodology of comparison because the criterion, which he sets forth for the evaluation of other religions, is highly subjective.

Rāmānuja maintains an equilibrium between two apparently opposite forces, namely intellectual consistency and emotional warmth. Śankara has maintained the former and the Ālvārs kept the latter. But Rāmānuja, with a genius for integration, maintains both these forces together in unity.

Next let us take Rudolf Otto, who characterized the bhakti tradition in general and the sect of Vaiṣṇavism in particular as "India's religion of grace". This may well be a useful description, but we need to recognize at the outset that this is not a phrase which occurs in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition itself. When Otto speaks of grace and the doctrine of grace, he is using Western terms with the association of Christian theology. We wonder whether Otto has noticed the conspicuous absence of the phrase "doctrine of grace" in Vaiṣṇavism. There is a doctrine of God and doctrine of the means to salvation, but there is no separate treatment of "the doctrine of grace". What is even more surprising, however, is that the two Sanskrit terms which are most easily translated as 'grace', that is to say, 'anugraha' and 'prasāda', play only a minor role in the theology of Rāmānuja, and his followers have not included these in their long list of divine attributes. This does not mean at all that there is no conception of divine grace, but

45

Ibid., pp. 233-240.

this conception is expressed in a number of terms which indicate quite specific aspects of divine love for creatures.⁴⁶ Otto's description, therefore, covers only an insignificant and minute section of Rāmānuja's religion. After a thorough examination of a few popular Vaiṣṇava movements, Otto made a general statement about Vaiṣṇavism as a whole. Rāmānuja's system is not entirely based on grace, but on bhakti saturated with knowledge. Unfortunately, later disciples of Rāmānuja could not comprehend the truth for which he fought and lived. They were divided among themselves on the issue of the path of liberation.⁴⁷

In the light of the issues discussed, namely the need to single out what may be the unique philosophical and theological achievement of Rāmānuja, the jñāna-bhakti-samuccaya, such was never achieved before or since his time in the history of Indian religion (with the exception of the Bhagavadgītā itself), and the need to see him in the true Vedāntic and even Advaitic perspective, this modest investigation seems to be justified. Also, as in the case of all great thinkers, Rāmānuja too has suffered at the hands of his followers and even admirers. It is hoped that this humble effort has done justice to this great religious thinker and teacher and has not done injustice to anyone else.

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See Chapter II.

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See Chapter V.

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