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SRI RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA
BANGALORE

Published by:

Swami Harshananda

President

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama

Bangalore 560 019

First Edition : June 1990

2 M 1C

Rupees TWO

Printed at:

Sri Nithyananda Printers

Ashoknagar, Bangalore 50

Phone : 626027

FOREWORD

Originally *Śrivaishnavism through the Ages* appeared as an article in the *Prabuddha Bharata* (January 1966) a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order. The same is now being brought out as a booklet after some revision. We earnestly hope that this will serve as an introduction to the study of Viśiṣṭādvaita and the cult of Śrivaishnavism which are important aspects of the Vedāntic religion. We are grateful to the devotees of the Lord, who like to remain anonymous, for having contributed to subsidising this booklet.

— S.H.

ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVISM THROUGH THE AGES

Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the religion, and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, its philosophy, are of hoary antiquity. In his introductory verse of *Śrībhāṣya* (the commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*), Śrī Rāmānuja traces this philosophy to the Upaniṣads, which was well guarded by the later *ācāryas* like Vyāsa, Bodhāyana, Ṭaṅka, Dramiḍa, Guhadeva, Kapardin, Bhāruci, and others. According to the tradition that obtains among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the religion of Śrīvaiṣṇavism was first taught by the Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself to Lakṣmī, His divine consort, who communicated the same to Viṣvaksena. From him it was handed over to a series of teachers headed by Śaṭhakopa.

The Ālvārs

Ālvārs are Śrīvaiṣṇava saints of the Tamil country who lived between the sixth and the ninth centuries A.D. The word 'Ālvār' literally means one who is immersed in divine love. They are twelve in number: Poygai, Pūdam, Pey, Tirumoliśai, Nammālvār, Kulaśekhara, Periyālvār, Tondaraḍippoḍi, Tirumaṅgai, Madhurakavi, and Āṇḍāl. Theirs was a religion of ecstatic love for God. Hence, neither caste nor sex was any barrier to their attaining to that state.

Coming to the historical times, it was these Ālvārs who first propagated the religion and the philosophy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism through their songs. These songs, called the *Nālāyira*

Prabandham, combine in themselves rare poetic beauty and high philosophical tenets, couched in a simple language.

Nammālvār, the author of the famous *Tiruvāimoli*, is by far the greatest among them. He is called the Kūṭastha by the later Ācāryas of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, because the fundamental doctrines of this faith as current today were taught by him.

The Ācāryās

The Ālvār movement was more emotional in nature than metaphysical. The Ālvārs were great devotees of the Lord Viṣṇu. They believed in the impermanence of worldly enjoyments and in the acquisition of liberation by union with Him. They taught more by example than by precept, though they propagated the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita in their songs.

Hence it was left to the Ācāryas beginning with Nāthamuni, who succeeded the Ālvārs, to put the system on a firm footing, basing it both upon the Sanskrit scriptures and the Tamil teachings of the Ālvārs. The Ācāryas were very orthodox Brāhmaṇas, versed equally in

Sanskrit and Tamil, who passed through the different stages of orthodox life and discharged their duties so as to serve as an ideal for their followers. Apart from expounding the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita, they also laid down various rules for the proper observance of festivals, fasts, vows, and customs. They were thus the makers of modern Śrīvaiṣṇavism. It is not surprising, therefore, that they in turn have become objects of worship like the Ālvārs whom they themselves apotheosized.

The first of the Ācāryas was Raṅganāthamuni, popularly known as Nāthamuni (A.D. 824-924). He was at once an erudite scholar, a *yogin*, and a devotee. It was he who first collected all the *Prabandhams*,

edited them with proper introductory verses, popularized them by setting them to music, and made them sung in temples. It was, again, he who gave these *Prabandhams* the status equal to that of the Vedas in temple festivals. The various reforms brought about by Nāthamuni necessitated the creation of a post of a universal Ācārya whose authority was law in religious worship and whose advice was a guide to temples and house-holders. It was but natural that when such a post was established, the choice should fall on Nāthamuni himself. Since this office was combined with the management of the Srirangam temple, it was easy for the Ācāryas to revolutionize and reorganize the Śrīvaiṣṇava cult by introducing the necessary reforms first in that temple, which is

one of the most important shrines of Viṣṇu and a stronghold of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

Nāthamuni was succeeded by Puṇḍarīkākṣa and Rāmamiśra for two short periods. Then came Yāmunācārya, who was the grandson of Nāthsmuni himself. It was he who, endowed with great scholarship and insight, first attempted to put the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy on a firm foundation. He wrote competent works in Sanskrit defending it, and established the orthodoxy of the Pāñcarātra school, whose authority is accepted as equal to that of the Śrutis by the Viśiṣṭādvaitins. *Siddhitraya* and *Āgamaprāmāṇya* are his two important works, in addition to the *Gītārthasaṅgraha*. It was his cherished desire to write a commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtras*

according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita, just as Śaṅkara had done according to the Advaita. But he died before he could attempt it, and it fell on Rāmānuja to achieve it.

Śrī Rāmānuja

The name of Śrī Rāmānuja is inseparably associated with the Viśiṣṭādvaita, just as Śrī Śaṅkara's is with the Advaita. The traditional date of his birth is A.D. 1017, and he is said to have lived for 120 years. Yāmuna died before Śrī Rāmānuja became the Ācārya, and the interval was filled up by Mahāpūrṇa.

Yāmuna bequeathed to Rāmānuja the three great tasks of his life which he himself had failed to achieve, viz., the perpetuation of the memory of the sage Parāśara, the immortalization of the glory of Nammālvār, and the interpretation of Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahma-Sūtras* according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita system. Śrī Rāmānuja fulfilled all these three in his

lifetime. He commanded Bhaṭṭa, the son of Kūreśa, to write a commentary on *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, and named him as Parāśara. He authorized Kurukeśa, the son of his uncle Śrīśailapūrṇa, to compose a commentary on the *Tiruvāimoli of Nammālvār*.

To achieve the third object, Śrī Rāmānuja had to undertake an arduous journey to Kashmir, where the last surviving copy of the *Vṛtti* of Bodhāyana, a commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* was available. After going through it with great difficulty, he composed his *Śrībhāṣya*, a masterly commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*.

Śrī Rāmānuja was as great an organizer as he was a thinker. He divided the Śrīvaiṣṇava

world into seventy-four Ācāryic dioceses, over each of which he appointed a pious householder as the head or 'simhāsanādhipati' as he was called. These spiritual leaders earnestly took up the work of carrying the message of Viśiṣṭādvaita to all the villages and homes, each within his diocese.

Split in Śrīvaiṣṇava Ranks

The demise of Śrī Rāmānuja was followed by a period of sectarian split among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, which ultimately ended in the permanent division of their ranks into the two sects of Vaḍagalais and Teṅgalais. These words literally mean the followers of the northern and the southern schools respectively. The two sects developed separate sets of works, separate lineage of *gurus*, and separate traditions in many matters of practical importance.

The language of the holy books to be studied, the comparative importance of bhakti and prapatti (self-surrender) in the path of liberation, relation with the lower castes, details of certain ceremonials to be observed

on certain special occasions, and a few other questions were the causes for such a division. The Vaḍagalais favoured the Sanskrit works and the path of bhakti, and were more conservative in their relation towards the lower castes. The Teṅgalais, on the other hand, preferred the Tamil works to the Sanskrit ones, and laid greater stress on prapatti based on the “mārjalakiśora-nyāya” (the maxim of the kitten totally dependent on its mother) than on the “markaṭakiśora-nyāya” (the maxim of the young one of the monkey which clings to its mother). The latter assumes self-effort as a prerequisite to prapatti whereas the former does not.

Though there has never been a check to interdining, intermarriage, and free social har-

mony at home or at the temple, the allegiance to different teachers and philosophies, as also the scramble for control over the temples, has perpetuated this division.

Apostolic Successors of Śrī Rāmānuja

The two sects have a different guruparam-parā, (succession of teachers) though both trace their origin to Śrī Rāmānuja himself. Kurukeśa was the first successor of Śrī Rāmānuja according to the Vaḍagalais. Viṣṇucitta, his successor, is the author of two famous works *Sārārthacatuṣṭaya* and *Viṣṇucittīyam* (a commentary on the *Viṣṇu purāṇa*). The next in line is Varadārya or Varadācārya, otherwise known as Naḍādūr Ammāl. A substance of his lectures and interpretations of the *Śrībhāṣya* was committed to writing under the title of *Śrutaprakāśikā* by a talented disciple of his, named Sudarśanasūri.

After the death of Varadārya, the Ācārya

ship devolved on Ātreya Rāmānuja, who in turn was succeeded by Vedānta Deśika or Veṅkaṭanātha.

Śrī Vedānta Deśika

Śrī Vedānta Deśika (A.D. 1268-1370), who was a contemporary of Śrī Vidyāraṇya, is undoubtedly the greatest of the Ācāryās of the post-Rāmānuja period. For more than three quarters of a century, he enriched the Śrīvaiṣṇava world with his teachings and writings. His works number more than a hundred, and are characterized by versatility, beauty of style and thought, and a deep spiritual insight. He was a poet, a philosopher, a thinker, a polemist, and a sage, all rolled into one. His works include original writings in Tamil, as also commentaries on older works. *Gītā-bhāṣya-tātparya-candrikā*, *bhāṣya* on *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*, *Tattvaṭikā*, *Adhikaraṇasārāvalī*, *Nyāya-*

siddhañjana, *Saccaritrarakṣā*, *Rahasyatraya-sāra*, and *Haṁsasandeśa* are only a few of the important works which may be mentioned here. It is not a matter of surprise that he was called in his own times as Kavitārkikasiṃha. One of the greatest of his services was his saving the *Śrutaparakāśikā* from the chaos that followed in the wake of invasion of Srirangam by the Mohammedans. It is for this reason that his name as Vedāntācārya is gratefully remembered by all the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, without sectarian bias, in beginning the study of the *Śrībhāṣya*.

Pillai Lokācārya

The Teṅgalai sect traces the apostleship in succession of Śrī Rāmānuja in the following manner : Embār, Parāśara Bhaṭṭa, Naṅjīyar (the famous commentator of the *Prabandham*), Nampillai, Kṛṣṇapāda, Pillai Lokācārya, Tirumalai Ālvār, Maṇavāḷa Māmuni (or Varavaramuni). Among these, Pillai Lokācārya, who was a contemporary of Vedānta Deśika, occupies the same place amidst the Teṅgalais as Deśika does among the Vaḍagalais. In fact, he is generally regarded as the founder of Teṅgalaism as a distinct sect. Being a man of brilliant intellect, he composed several treatises in order to uphold his school. *Vacanabhūṣaṇa* is a difficult work in aphoristic

style which deals with the doctrine of prapatti in all its aspects. For the benefit of women and the common folk, Lokācārya composed sixteen treatises on the secret doctrines and the philosophy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism like *Nigamanapadī*, *Mumukṣupadī*, *Tattavatraya*, *Arthapañcaka*, etc. Though most of these works are small in size, they are regarded by the Teṅgalai school as the only correct interpretation of the cults of Śrī Rāmānuja and the Ālvārs.

Maṇavāla Māmuni

Pillai Lokācārya was succeeded by Śrīśaileśa, who in turn handed over the Ācāryaship to Maṇavāla Māmuni, also known as Aḷagiya Maṇavāla or Varavaramuni. He was a master of the Tamil Veda and other lore. Though he was trained by the teachers of the Vaḍagalai sect also, he openly declared that *Īḍu* (the commentary by Kṛṣṇapāda on the Tamil Veda) was the equal of *Śrībhāṣya*. He wrote several works explaining the treatises of Pillai Lokācārya. Though his works were limited in range and diction, he gave a definite form to Teṅgalaism. His magnetic personality elevated him in the eyes of his followers to the position of an incarnation of Śrī Rāmānuja.

Śrīvaiṣṇavism in Practice

Everyone born in a Śrīvaiṣṇava family must approach a proper guru and undergo what is called 'pañcasamskāra', if he is to be considered as a true Śrīvaiṣṇava. This fivefold ritual includes tapas or the Ācārya's initiating the student into the sacred fire by branding the latter's shoulders with the symbols of Viṣṇu ; the puṇḍra or initiating into wearing the sectarian mark, the symbol of the Lord's foot ; giving a spiritual name like Nārāyaṇadāsa or Govindadāsa to the disciple; imparting the three mantras. viz., the *aṣṭākṣarī*, the *dvaya*, and the *caramaśloka* ; and handing over a śālagrāma or other concrete objects for daily worship.

Though in theory this pañcasamskāra is enough to secure the devotee's entry into the blissful world of Lord Viṣṇu, in practice he finds that his past karma and present weaknesses are serious obstacles to spiritual progress. He is thus forced to realize that the Lord's grace is absolutely necessary, and therefore surrenders himself at His feet. This is technically called 'prapatti' or 'śaraṇāgati', and the devotee who does it is known as the 'prapanna'.

The prapanna is again, in need of a mediator, since he is unable to communicate with the Lord directly. Therefore, he has to go to a teacher and beg him to intercede on his behalf and place his soul at the Lord's feet. This vicarious employment of the teacher is technically designated as 'bhāraṇyāsa'.

Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas

The evolution and consolidation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism as a cult is closely associated with the origin and development of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas or monasteries. From the most ancient times, āśramas and maṭhas in India have been the repositories of religion in theory and practice. Their heads, whether monks or pious householders, have been responsible for arresting the decay of dharma and for propagating true religion, apart from guiding the society often in secular matters also. The same holds good in the case of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas also. Ahobila Maṭha, Parakāla Maṭha, Yadugiri Yatirāja Maṭha, Āṇḍavan Maṭha and Vānamāmalai Maṭha —

these are some of the important maṭhas of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

The Ahobila Maṭha was founded in the year A.D. 1398, in the Ahobila Kshetra of Andhra Pradesh, by Śrīnivāsācārya, who became a *sannyāsin* under the name of Ādi Vaṇa Śaṭhakopa Svāmin. He was a great scholar and lived as a *sannyāsin* for the full length of sixty-years. The successive Jeers or abbots of the Maṭha have kept up the tradition of erudition and of touring the country to spread religion.

According to the tradition that obtains at the Parakāla Maṭha in Mysore (Karnataka), its founder was Śrī Vedānta Deśika himself: His disciple, Periya Brahmatantra Svatantra Svāmin, occupied the pīṭha or pontifical seat

in A.D. 1360. So far there have been thirty-three Jeers. The principal deity worshipped in the Maṭha in Hayagrīva, which has been handed down to the Maṭha from Śrī Vedānta Deśika himself.

Yadugiri is a small hill about thirty miles to the east of Mysore. It is claimed that Śrī Rāmānuja himself established a maṭha here during A.D. 1103. This Maṭha, known as Yadugiri Yatirāja Maṭha, had a branch at Rewa, which is now functioning independently. Some of the Jeers of this Maṭha had kept contacts with North India also.

The Āṇḍavan Maṭha, better known as “Śrīraṅgam Āṇḍavan Āśrama”, has its main centre at Srīraṅgam in Tamil Nadu. Vedānta

Rāmānuja Deśika is the founder of this Maṭha, the youngest among the Śrivaishṇava Maṭhas. It was started in early nineteenth century. The present head is the seventh in the apostolic succession.

Vānamāmalai Maṭha was established at Nangunderi, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, by Maṇavāla Māmuni during the fourteenth century A.D. So far there have been twenty-seven Jeers.

The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita

Any account of the history of Śrīvaiṣṇavism should be deemed incomplete without a description of its philosophical tenets. As has already been pointed out, this philosophy is much older than Śrī Rāmānuja, who only systematized it. However, the pioneering and yet stupendous work he has turned out in the cause of Viśiṣṭādvaita has justified its being called as 'Rāmānuja Darśana'. Viśiṣṭādvaita is essentially a philosophy of religion. In it, reason and faith coalesce to become 'reasoned faith'. It is often identified with the older 'Seśvara Mīmāṃsā', and is also called 'Ubhaya Vedānta', since it accepts both the Sanskrit *Prasthānatraya* and

the Tamil *Prabandham* as equally authoritative. *Pāñcarātra* treatises are also put on a par with the Vedas.

Epistemology

Śri Rāmānuja accepts knowledge in all its levels of sense-perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and scriptural testimony (*āgama* or *śabda*) as valid, and also that it affirms reality. The principle of *dharmabhūta-jñāna*, the logical rule of *apṛthak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa*, the grammatical rule of *sāmānādhikarāṇya*, and the realistic view of *satkāryavāda* are the special features of his theory of knowledge.

Dharmabhūta-jñāna is the consciousness of the individual soul as its attribute, through

which it comes to know the nature of the external world, Self, and Īśvara or Brahman. It is eternal and all pervasive in respect of Īśvara and the jīvas. However, owing to the limitations imposed by karma, it has become contracted. When it is purified, it expands into infinity and brings about an immediate intuition of God.

The logical rule of apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa states that a viśeṣaṇa (quality) subsists in the viśeṣya (the qualified substance) and is apr̥thak-siddha or has an inseparable existence. Of course, it is not absolutely identical with it. It is separate and yet inseparable. For instance, when we say that 'man is rational', the quality of rationality is inseparable from man, though it is not man himself. In the view of Śrī

Rāmānuja, dharmabhūta-jñāna is an apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa of the jīva; the jīvas and prakṛti are apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa of Brahman or Īśvara.

This very truth is brought out by the grammatical rule of sāmānādhikaraṇya or co-ordinate predication, which means the application of two terms to a single entity through connotation of its two modes. For example, in the sentence 'This is a cow', different words connoting genus and quality (i.e. jāti and guṇa) also connote individual (vyakti) and substance (guṇin) respectively. Same is the case with the Upaniṣadic text 'Tat tvam asi' (Thou art That). A substance may become the body or quality of another substance and a word connoting the body (śarīra) may connote

the self, its possessor (śarīrin) also. Therefore, in the above example, the term 'tvam', which connotes the jīva as the śarīra, connotes also Brahman, the śarīrin. Thus, in the highest Vedāntic sense, all terms connoting a thing or a person or a god connote also Brahman as the source, support, and the ultimate Self of all.

The Sāṅkhya theory of satkāryavāda, the theory of pre-existent effect, is accepted by Śrī Rāmānuja. Consequently, the world, which is a transformation (pariṇāma) of Brahman, is real and not illusory as asserted by the Advaitins.

Ontology

Viśiṣṭādvaita accepts the three entities, viz., Brahman or Īśvara, jīva or cit, and prakṛti

or acit as the ultimate realities. Hence, these three together are called as 'tattvatraya'. Of these, however, Brahman is the absolute, independent reality, whereas the other two are dependent realities. It is for this reason that this philosophy is known as Viśiṣṭādvaita (Viśiṣṭa Advaita), a philosophy which accepts only one Reality, but with attributes or modes.

Brahman of Viśiṣṭādvaita is both the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion at the same time. Truth (satya) knowledge (jñāna), infinity (anantatva), and bliss (ānandatva) are His attributes. He is the repository of all virtues and perfections. He is the progenitor, the protector, and the destroyer of this universe. He is also the indweller and controller of everything that exists in this universe.

He is the śeṣin (the whole) of whom all the jīvas and the prakṛti are śeṣa (parts). He is the granter of all boons, whether it is righteousness (dharma), worldly gain (artha), and enjoyment of pleasures (kāma) or the attainment of freedom from births and deaths (mokṣa). His form is most wonderfully beautiful, absolutely free from all imperfections and defects. Out of His infinite mercy, He incarnates Himself in moments of cosmic crisis into humanity, in order that He may recover the lost jīva. He is the master of Śrī or Lakṣmī, Bhū, and Nīlā. Śrī is of the nature of mercy.

He enjoys the cosmic līlā or play of creation. He creates this universe out of the *cit* and *acit* portions of Himself and yet remains unaffected in His essential nature. Since He creates

in accordance with the past karma of the individual souls, He can never be accused of partiality or hardheartedness.

He has a fivefold form, viz., para, vyūha, vibhava, antaryāmin, and arca. The first is His form in Vaikuṇṭha, along with Śrī, Bhū, Nīlā, Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and others. The avatāras of Saṅksarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, who are His partial manifestations and who are the objects of contemplation by the devotees, go by the name of vyūha. The incarnations of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Kūrma, etc. are called as vibhava. As the indwelling spirit of each and every object (animate or inanimate), He is called the antaryāmin. The descent into the forms, symbols, or idols worshipped by His devotees, in order to bless them, is known as

arcāvatāra.

The next tattva is cit or the jīva. The jīvas are innumerable but of identical form and nature. Each jīva is essentially different from the body, mind, prāṇa, buddhi, and dharmabhūta-jñāna. He is blissful (ānandasvarūpa), atomic (aṇu), unmanifested (avyakta), unthinkable (acintya), homogeneous (niravayava), immutable (nirvikāra), substratum of consciousness and knowledge (jñānāśraya). He is controlled by Īśvara (niyamya), and is a part of Him (śeṣa). He is knower of knowledge, doer of actions, and experiencer of their results (jñātṛ, kartṛ, and bhokṛ).

The jīvas can be divided into three groups: the bound (baddha), the liberated (mukta),

and the eternally free (nitya). The bound souls are those who are constantly going through this transmigratory existence being attracted by and attached to the prakṛti in all its forms. Those of the bound souls who awaken to the evils of saṁsāra owing to their previous good karma and get liberated by doing spiritual practices and by the grace of God belong to the second category. Those like Ananta or Garuḍa who are never bound by the shackles of saṁsāra form the third category. The jīva, though essentially free, becomes bound in saṁsāra by the proximity of prakṛti, avidyā, karma, vāsanā, and ruci. Avidyā is ignorance which manifests itself in various forms like anyathā-jñāna (knowing a thing in a way that is different from what it really is), viparīta-jñāna

(knowing a thing as the opposite of what it really is), etc. Karma is what is performed by the body, the senses, or the mind, whether good or bad. Doing anything unintentionally is vāsanā. Ruci is the inordinate desire created by vāsanā. Through bhakti and prapatti and the consequent grace of God, these bondages are destroyed.

The last tattva is acit or prakṛti. It is the insentient substance out of which this material universe is evolved. It is ever changing and can never be the substratum of knowledge. It is of two kinds: śuddhasattva and miśrasattva. The first is the material which is absolutely free from rajas and tamas, which is eternal, which is not subject to karma but only to the will of God. It is the substance out of which all things

in Vaikuṇṭha (which is called nityavibhūti, as opposed to this temporal world, called līlavibhūti) are made. The second, viz miśrasattva, comprises the three guṇas — sattva, rajas, and tamas. It is this which is evolved as this universe.

Out of these, Brahman or Īśvara is the independent reality, and the other two are dependent realities which inhere in Him by the principle of sāmānādhikarāṇya. Just as skin, flesh, seed, colour, taste, and smell can all exist in the same mango simultaneously, so also the cit and acit can exist in the one Brahman.

Means of Liberation

The mumukṣus, or those desirous of liberation, have to know three things: tattva or

Reality, hita or the means of attaining that Reality, and puruṣāratha or the nature of attainment. Of these, tattva has already been described.

As regards the hita, the scriptures have described it in various ways. These things can be grouped under five headings, and are consequently known as 'arthapañcaka'. They are: *sva-svarūpa* (one's own nature), *parasvarūpa* (nature of God), *puruṣārtha-svarūpa* (nature of the four ends in life), *upāya-svarūpa* (nature of the means to liberation), and *virodhi-svarūpa* (nature of the obstacles in spiritual path).

Out of these, the first two have already been delineated while describing the tat-

tvatraya. Puruṣārthas, or the things desired for by men, are four in number: dharma (practice of righteousness); artha (economic gain); kāma (enjoyments of the pleasures of life); and mokṣa (freedom from saṁsāra). Of these, the mumukṣu should know that the real puruṣārtha is mokṣa.

Upāya, or the means to liberation, is fivefold: karma, jñāna, bhakti, prapatti, and ācāryābhimāna. Karma includes all such acts like yajña, dāna, sandhyā, pañcayajñas, dhyāna, tīrthayātrā, etc. Jñāna or jñāna-yoga consists of self-renouncement (vairāgya) and ceaseless practice of contemplation on Lord Nārāyaṇa. This leads to the realization of the Self, but not to that of the Lord.

The next step is bhakti. Bhakti or bhakti-yoga marks the consummation of moral and spiritual endeavour as attained in the other two yogas. The Viśiṣṭādvaita constructs a ladder, as it were, from ethics to religion and from religion to mystic union. The seven aids to bhakti are: viveka (purification of the body as the living temple of God); vimoka (inner detachment); abhyāsa (ceaseless practice of the selfpresence of God as the inner Self); kriyā (service to all beings); kalyāṇa (practice of virtue); anavasāda (freedom from despair); and anuddharṣa (absence of exultation).

Prapatti is complete self-surrender, and is meant for those who are unable to follow either karma-yoga, jñānayoga, or bhakti-yoga. Its main characteristics are: to conceive what

is in conformity with the will of God; to reject what is disagreeable to Him; to have firm faith that He will save; to seek Him alone as the protector; and to surrender one's self to Him in all meekness.

Ācāryābhimāna is strong faith in the guru and his affectionate attachment to the disciple.

The obstacles to the spiritual path (virodhi), which are the last of the arthapañcaka, are again fivefold: obstacle to the realization of the Self; to the realization of God; to mokṣa; to the means of realization; and to attainment of the goal.

State of Liberation

The liberated soul has a direct vision of Brahman in Vaikuṇṭha and is absorbed in the eternal bliss of union with Him (sāyujya). To

him the pluralistic world remains, but the pluralistic view is abolished. The distinction between him and Brahman still remains, and there is no loss of personality. He will continue for ever to enjoy this state of bliss by serving Brahman.

Conclusion

Viśiṣṭādvaita is thus not a dry metaphysics, but a philosophy of religion. In it, reason and faith have been nicely synthesized. It guarantees the vision of God and salvation to all finite beings — human, subhuman, or celestial. The view that God is immanent in all for the purpose of cosmic redemption inspires the feeling that the God of all religions is ultimately one, though the various seers and sects may give different accounts of Him.





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