

*Visistadvaita*  
**A Philosophy of Religion**

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**Dedicated to the  
Being of Sri Sathya Sai  
TAT Embodied**

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## Preface

Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, not only interprets metaphysics in terms of religion, and religion in terms of metaphysics, but equates the two by the common designation *darsana*. *Darsana* connotes a Vedanta philosophical system as well as spiritual perception of Reality, and may be explained as an integral intuition of the Brahman.

In extreme monism, the Brahman is *jnaana* and is realized by *jnaana*. Extreme theism distrusts the intellect and relies on scriptural faith. But in Visistadvaita, the Brahman can be enquired into as well as experienced. Conceptual knowledge of God is exalted by the soul-sense of God, and the soul-sight of God is rationalized by conceptual knowledge.

Ramanuja integrates the experiences of *risis* and Alvars in relation to the Brahman, the Supreme Self, and expounds what is called *Ubhaya-Vedanta*. As a philosopher-saint, he establishes the truths of Visistadvaita as embodied in the Vedantasutras. Simultaneously, he elucidates each adhikarana of the Sutras as experience of the Brahman, *brahmanubhava*. He gives a critical exposition of the experiences of the Alvars by showing their logical coherence. As a saint, he experiences God, and as a philosopher, he proves the truths of spiritual experience. He establishes that Sribhashyam, his commentary on Vedantasutras, and the Bhagavad-visaya, the logical exposition of the spiritual experiences of Nammalvar, are similar in content and look to the Brahman as the Ultimate to be attained. He is thus the exponent of Vedanta as stated in Vedantasutras and in Bhagavad-visaya and is, therefore, considered the architect of *Ubhaya-Vedanta*. The end and aim of *Ubhaya-Vedanta* is summed up in the Upanisad itself: 'He who knows the Brahman attains the Highest'.

The catholicity of Visistadvaita lies in its synthetic insight into truth, and the spiritual transformation of such insight into universal love. Ramanuja's synthetic method consists in his conclusion that all ideas and names ultimately connote the Brahman, Narayana, that the worship of deities like Indra is really the worship of Narayana, the inner ruler of all beings. The terms *sarva-saririn*, *sarva-sabdavacya* and *sarva-raksaka* refer only to the Brahman or Narayana.

Srivaisnavism, as a living religion, owes itself to Ramanuja. He has moulded it into a religion of *sattvic* love based on *sastraic* authority and spiritual experience. Visistadvaitic Srivaisnavism lays stress on personal mystic experience rather than on supernaturalism and historicity. It guarantees God to all persons, and affords a philosophic basis for religious consciousness. For Ramanuja, God is love, the *atman* is eternal and the *Paramatman* is immanent. The idea of God as the *saririn* of all and as indwelling love is the contribution of Ramanuja. This concept offers the most inspiring motive for philosophic enlightenment and achievement of social integration. Visistadvaita is not a mere metaphysical enquiry into the nature of the Brahman as the ground of existence, but it is also a spiritual method of attaining the Brahman as the supreme end of life. Thus Visistadvaita establishes itself as a philosophy of religion.

It is significant to note that the term Visistadvaita is generally translated into English as Qualified Non-dualism. What is qualified in Visistadvaita is not Non-dualism, but the Brahman. Visistadvaita propounds that the Brahman is *saguna* as opposed to *nirguna*, though ontologically. It subscribes to the theory of Non-dualism, though of the *Saguna* Brahman. It is also significant to note that while Vaisnavism has evolved predating the Christian era as a non-Vedic religion of rites, Srivaisnavism, as a Vedic religion, has been the contribution of Vedic seers such as Sri

Ramanuja, Vedanta Desika, etc. These seers along with the Alvars have made Srivaisnavism a religion of spiritual realization.

This book Visistadvaita - A Philosophy of Religion borrows considerably from the work 'The Philosophy of Visistadvaita' by P.N.Srinivasachari, a very well researched and creative presentation.

## 1. Visistadvaita - A Darsana

A *Darsana* is a body of eternal and impersonal spiritual truths enshrined in Sruti, which can be logically tested and verified in personal experience. Sruti is self-valid, and the self-explanation of existence in its wholeness and of experience in its integrity. The Vedanta *Darsanas* afford insight into the nature of the Brahman. The ultimate proof of the existence of the Brahman is the experience of the Brahman. It is not *tarka-drsti*, the way of reasoning and dialectic, but *tattva-drsti*, the soul-sight of the Brahman, by knowing which everything is known.

Visistadvaita, a Vedanta *Darsana*, maintains its position in the history of Indian thought by establishing its own *siddhanta* by a criticism of rival systems. It has, at the same time, a synthetic insight into the essentials of other *Darsanas*, and accepts whatever in them is consistent with its basic principles. It is neither pure philosophy nor pure religion. It is a true philosophy of religion, which reconciles the opposition between philosophy and religion, and the conflict between monism and pluralism. If it is liberally interpreted in terms of contemporary philosophy and comparative religion without, in any way, sacrificing its foundational principles, it is capable of satisfying the demands of science and philosophy on the one hand, and of ethics and religion on the other.

It is the task of philosophy as an intellectual enquiry into the whole of reality to frame the ultimate problems of life. The three persistent problems of philosophy relate to God, nature and the self. Of them, the enquiry into the nature of God is the most valuable. The existence of God is established by the well-known theistic proofs, and not by revealed theology. Faith and reason belong to different realms. It is impossible to prove the existence of God by logical thinking. On the other hand, mere reason is ill founded and self-contradictory. As free thought leads to atheism, blind faith leads to dogmatism.

The conflict between faith and philosophy is mainly due to the difference in their method of approach or enquiry. Faith claims finality. When it is supported by reason working in a subordinate capacity, it becomes dogmatic. When dogma is sanctioned by tradition, and sanctified by the worship of word, it claims absolute allegiance. Faith then results in fanaticism.

On the other hand, philosophy rejects the way of faith. It accepts only the guidance of reason, and follows its conclusions. But, quite often, it starts doubting everything, and ends with doubts, with no solutions to the problems posed by it. The advancement of reason, for its own sake and unrelated to spiritual intuition, only leads to atheism. Theology, therefore, condemns its guidance and takes refuge in faith. This conflict between faith and philosophy will cease only if they get reconciled in a true philosophy of religion.

Visistadvaita offers a contrast to mere philosophical speculation on the whole of reality on one hand, and to religion in the sense of a faith in revealed theology on the other. Theology insists on dogmatic faith in truths regarded as infallible on account of scriptural authority or divine disclosure. It is by its nature antagonistic to the free exercise of reason on the facts provided by human experience, which is the hallmark of philosophy. Ramanuja's system of Visistadvaita recognizes the claims of both faith and reason. It aims at harmonizing or reconciling them. It admits a free play of reason as to the data of sense perception and inference. It also accepts spiritual intuition, *anubhava* of the great seers, and the doctrines or views recorded in the scriptures.

There is considerable divergence between secular thought and religious knowledge in different realms with varying results. The first stage is that of tension between naturalism and supernaturalism. The conflict is of value in so far as it leads to recognition of the fact that matter is real, though the materialistic outlook is false. It also becomes clear that a metaphysical system

cannot be built on the foundations of the physical-chemical sciences and mathematics. Polytheism, in whatever form, cannot satisfy the demand of reason for unity, and the ethical claims of righteousness.

The second is that of the collision between vitalism and animism. Vitalism accepts the primacy of reason, but denies the validity of faith. It also repudiates the mechanistic view of life. On the other hand, animism attributes life and divinity to nature. It assumes different forms such as metempsychosis, fetishism, totemism and spiritism. According to it, every natural object is animate and endowed with spirit.

Visistadvaita is opposed to both the philosophy of vitalism and the religion of animism. According to it, reality is life, but the category of life does not exhaust the whole range of reality. Living cells and protoplasm cannot adequately express the highest moral and spiritual values of experience.

Vedanta does not accept animism in any form as true religion. True religion begins with theism, and not with animism. To identify image worship with fetishism betrays ignorance and prejudice, as the image is the incarnation of the Infinite in the finite.

The third realm of conflict is between sensationalism and anthropomorphism. Sensationalism is the theory of reality conceived as a mental continuum or stream of psychic presentations. Psychology is descriptive, and does not accept the metaphysical view of a psyche or self. For sensationalism, consciousness is a mere continuum without a self.

On the other hand, anthropomorphism revolves round the tendency of making God infused with religious rites. For instance, the worship of the Vedic deity Visnu is fused with the Narayana cult and the Vaasudeva cult, and has become the Visnu-Narayana

religion of Vaisnavism. The concept of the *avatars* of Visnu is the Puranic way of tracing the evolutionary ascent of man from the sub-human levels and zoomorphic incarnations. The essential faith of anthropomorphism is that man is made in the image of God, and not God in the image of man.

Visistadvaita rejects the sensationalistic view of reality as inadequate and unsatisfactory, as it leads to nihilism. Religious truths are super-sensuous and eternal, and they cannot be discerned wholly by historic judgments, which apply only to events in sense perception. The true Vedic method is spiritual instruction according to the qualification and needs of the aspirant. The Vedantasutras afford true insight into Vedic religion when they explain the worship of different Vedic gods as that of their inner self, *antaryamin*, the Supreme Brahman.

The next phase of the contest is between rationalism and theology in their answers to the question of the nature of reality. Reason marks the transition in knowledge from consciousness to self-consciousness. On the other hand, rationalism pursues the logical method of determining truth in a clear and distinct way.

Rationalism, claiming to be philosophy, seeks the liberation of thought from the tyranny of dogmatic theology. It is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake founded on the inner light of reason and reflection. It is a process of self-criticism freed from subjection to external authority. Its method is rationalistic on account of its acceptance of reason as the highest authority in the acquisition of truth.

Though the existence of God cannot be proved by reason, He can be experienced by means of direct intuition. Intuition is the immediate experience of God transcending the realms of sentient experience and reason. It transcends the level of instinct and intellect, and is a direct insight into God or *Atman*; and it is

ineffable and incommunicable. *Atman* is a-logical and amoral. It cannot be apprehended by discursive reason or attained by moral effort. The a-logical and the amoral is the fulfillment of the logical and moral experience.

Visistadvaita accepts the method of testing truth by means of the disciplined logical intellect and emancipating it from the fallacies incidental to the investigation of truth. Its materialistic idea is *mukti*, salvation. It welcomes the Mimamsa view of *Vedadharmā* and insists on the authority of the moral consciousness. But it stresses on the philosophic need of intuiting the Brahman that is self-realized, and not something to be accomplished.

But theology does not favour this mystic philosophy. The mystic experience of God is particular, private and arbitrary without any objective validity. The mystic philosophy has no faith in the infallibility of revelation or *sastra*. Scripture is the word of God in the sense that it is infallible and eternal. To the theologian, literal faith in scriptural revelation is more important to religion than personal religion.

Religion is essentially theo-centric and cannot be traced to personal experience. The proof of God is meant either for the theist or for the atheist. The former is a believer and needs no proof. The atheist is a non-believer who rejects all proof. For religion, scripture is its own proof, and every word of it is an eternal truth. It is considered as holy as a shrine of God. Philosophic speculation is admissible only if, like a handmaid, it is subservient to faith, and justifies the truth of revelation deductively without resorting to the heretic method of logical criticism.

Faith is sanctified by tradition or *sat-sampradaya*. It is a heritage bequeathed to posterity in the form of divinely ordained truths. The theist believes that it is his duty to submit to spiritual authority, and be loyal to the tradition. It is the essence of

scholasticism that dogma, as an article of faith, should regulate life. For him, philosophy should learn to square with dogma and not conflict with it. And, conduct is to conform to the will of God as expressed in the sacred tradition, which is the final truth.

This conflict between faith and reason reaches its zenith when intuition tries to oust faith in revelation, and when faith tries to oust intuition. Authoritarianism is opposed to intuitionism on the ground that it refers to mere subjective and private experience, which can never be the same for all. It strengthens itself by alliance with forces of verbalism, dogmatism and fanaticism.

On the other hand, intuitionism is anti-theological. It is a spiritual quest for immediate religious experience. As such it allies with mysticism. Another form of intuitionism rejects religion as a mere appearance of reality, betraying the self-contradiction between man and God. Religion and its God disappear in the non-dual experience of oneness. But there cannot be a more solid reality than religious experience.

A true philosopher accepts the truths of religious faith, experiments with them and experiences them. He ventures to know the reality. On the other hand, true religion aims at realization of reality as the Brahman. Thus, a true philosophy of religion is neither a free rational speculation on the nature and value of reality, nor is it a theology with no faith in the trustworthiness of the pramanas of sense perception and reasoning.

The object of Vedanta is to raise man to the level of God. The finite is to be infinitized, and not the Infinite humanized. True religion is, therefore, not a nature religion, but is a self-revelation of God to the self with a view to perfecting it. The idea that religious faith is induced by the psychological conditions of life such as fear, anger and sex is not acceptable, as religious consciousness is spiritual and not sensual.

Vedanta makes an attempt to think out all things and discover their spiritual meaning and value, as a true religio-philosophical system. The *vedantin* seeks to know the right way of framing questions, and gradually recognizes that Vedanta is not the obstinate questioning of external things or mere revolutive thinking. It is but a spiritual quest or induction.

The dialogue between Varuna and his son Bhrgu in the Taittiriya Upanisad brings out this concept in a classical way. The problem posed to Bhrgu is: 'What is that from which these beings are born, by which they are sustained and into which they return?' Bhrgu, as a philosopher-mystic, seeks to understand the problem and solve it by a resolute spiritual effort and consecrated life. He attempts various definitions of the Brahman as suggested by the teacher like *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijnaanamaya*, which have their parallels in western thought as materialism, vitalism, mentalism and rationalism. None of these definitions satisfies him, as none exhausts the nature of the Absolute. Only the Absolute reckons the Absolute. It is alone self-complete and supremely valuable. Then Bhrgu concludes that the Brahman is *anandamaya*, the intuitional Highest, and that the mystic experience of the Brahman is the crown and consummation of knowledge.

Vedanta is thus an enquiry into the meaning of the Brahman and is really a *Darsana*. The term darsana adequately expresses the foundational truths of Vedanta. It is the philosophic knowledge of reality strengthened by *viveka*, discrimination and *vairagya*, freedom from sense-desires, as well as the spiritual realization of that knowledge. It is an organic integration of *sruti*, scripture; *yukti*, logic; and *anubhava*, intuitive experience. In other words, they relate to revelational faith, rational enquiry and intuitive verifiability in that order.

Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, reconciles the extremes of reason and faith by the sublime truth that the Brahman

is the ultimate explanation of the world of *cit*, the sentient and *acit*, the insentient. It is the supreme end of spirituality, and outside the Brahman there is no reality. The more the *jiva* is spiritual, the more *brahmanized* it is. Visistadvaita avers that the *sattvata* religion of the Pancaratra is the word of God promoting godliness, and is, therefore, true.

In fact, the divine experiences of the Alvars have Vedantic validity and value. Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, reconciles revelation, reason and intuition, claims to be universal, and accepts whatever is coherent with its cardinal truths. It solicits humanity to participate in the riches of *brahmanubhava*, the experience of the Brahman. Its spiritual hospitality knows no barriers, either geographical or racial.

## 2. The Theory of Knowledge

### General

The central idea of Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, is the integration and harmonization of all knowledge obtained through sense perception, inference and revelation. The key to revelation is enshrined in the Upanisadic text, *brahmavid apnoti param* meaning 'he who knows the Brahman attains the highest'. This axiom affirms the interrelated unity of the threefold system of Vedantic wisdom known as *tattva*, *hita* and *purusartha*, elaborated in the Vedantasutras.

*Tattvajnaana* is the philosophic exposition of the Brahman as the immanent ground of existence, and the inner self of all things. *Hita* involves the determination of the moral and spiritual means of *sadhana* for realizing the Brahman. *Purusartha* is the attainment of the Brahman as the *summum bonum* of life by realizing which everything is realized.

Visistadvaita accepts the trustworthiness of thought. It is a philosophy of affirmation and valuation. It answers the three basic questions of philosophy, 'what can I know? What ought I to do? And what may I hope for?' thus: The Brahman is knowable as the supreme *tattva*. *Hita* is doing one's duty as *brahmarpana*. *Purusartha* is the *brahmanization* of the self so that the self attains the eternal nature of the Brahman. The philosophy of religion, for Visistadvaita, gathers the divergent lines of thought, and combines them in a synthetic way. All the currents of knowledge converge in the Brahman by knowing which everything is known.

The first problem of philosophy 'what can I know?' relates to the theory of knowledge, its origin and nature. The Visistadvaita epistemology provides an answer to it.

The problem of epistemology is the problem of the relation between knowledge and reality. The question raised in this regard is as follows: 'What is the connection between the course of consciousness in the individual self, and the world of persons and things which constitute the objective world *par excellence* and the All-Self?' This question does not presuppose a radical distinction between rational psychology, cosmology and theology on one hand, and the knowledge of the self, nature and God on the other, as they are interrelated. The world of knowledge has a unity sustained by the intelligent self, which endures in all the levels of experience including the perceptual, the rational and the revelation.

The first question in epistemology is about the origin and possibility of knowledge. Visistadvaita affirms the knowability of reality. It asserts that we can know things as they are. In the perceptive judgment as in 'I see a rose', the self with its *jnaana* perceives the object rose, and does not passively receive the visual sensation. The knowledge presupposes a knowing self and an object of thought. It is explained as an ascent from the sensation to the self.

Sensations form the raw material of knowledge. They become percepts by means of the *a priori* form prescribed by the mind. The perceived objects are conceived and arranged by the synthetic mind or understanding. The mind or understanding brings together the perceived objects, and forms judgments. Without the unity of self-consciousness, sensation cannot pass into perception and conception, or judgment.

Reason unifies the judgments. It is a higher principle than understanding, and arrives at the idea of self, nature and God as the highest unity. Thus, epistemology begins with sensation as the matter of knowledge, and proceeds through perception and conception to the self as the synthetic unity of knowledge.

Visistadvaita, however, lays stress on the work of thought as a revelatory function. Knowledge is not a synthetic construction, but a process by which things are revealed. The objects in nature are given, and not made by thought. It is the function of thought to reveal them, and not to create them.

According to Visistadvaita, *jnaana*, the attributive intelligence of the self can reveal both itself and the object outside it. In the act of perception, it streams out from the self towards the object and illumines it. This is in contrast with the concept of *antahkarana* of the Advaita.

*Jnaana* or knowledge, for this system of thought, starts from the *atman*. With the *manas* and the *indriyas*, it comes into contact with the object (*artha*), assumes its form, and thus reveals it. The knowledge of the object thus arises when *jnaana* contacts the object through the inner and outer senses. This theory has the merit of recognizing the primal nature of consciousness, *jnaana* and the relative independence of the conscious self and the non-conscious object. The object is not a *vrtti* or idea or psychosis objectified by *avidya* or nescience. It is not the counterfeit self of *ahamkara* or egoism. This concept predicates the reality of the perceiving self, and of the external world that is perceived. Both are interdependent, essential to knowledge. This is neither materialism nor mentalism.

The theory of perception of Visistadvaita is a profound truth satisfying the demands of science and philosophic speculation. Many of the theories of the origin of knowledge fail to give a satisfactory account of *pratyaksa* or sense perception. Science is a specialized knowledge of some aspect of reality. It is, therefore, fractional, fragmentary and abstract.

In the judgment of sight perception 'I see the rose', the physicist traces the visual sensation to the light vibrations starting

from the object and stimulating the eye, which is like a photographic camera, and to the formation of the visual image on the retina. The physiologist then refers to the response of the neuron to the external stimulus and also to the passage of the impulse to the visual area where it is resisted by the synapses, causing the flash of consciousness.

The psychologist then explains sensation as the report of the sensory stimulation in consciousness, which gives us acquaintance with the object. Each sensation has its specific functioning on account of which the eye can only see the thing, and the ear hear the sound.

But the sense object is not bare sensation. The knowledge of the object traces to the synthetic unity of apperception that is in one's self-consciousness. The exponent of each succeeding view thus begins where the other ends, with the result that there is no real explanation of the process by which the self knows the object 'rose'.

It is possible to explain the concrete experience by synthetic coordination of the abstract truths of physics, physiology and psychology, genetic and rational. The Visistadvaita theory of knowledge avoids the perils of the analytic method. It states the simple fact that the self with its *jnaana* knows the object, which is relatively external to it. The self seeks to know the external object through the channels of the senses as a whole. This is similar to perceiving white light as a whole in spite of its separate spectral colours. This synthetic view is thus the culmination, and completion of the conclusions of the sciences such as physics, physiology and psychology.

Knowledge is the self-revelation of the real object as a whole. It is not a piecing together or juxtaposition of the rational with the empirical. It is not an ascent from the particulars of sense

to a pervading identity. It is not a descent, too, from the universal to the particular. The object is not the copy of the idea, nor is the idea the archetype of the object. Neither is deduced from the other.

To say that the mind or its *vrtti*, form creates the object and takes its form is to take no account of the object at all. The object is not 'not-self made of *avidya*' opposed to the self, but a real thing in terra firma. It includes other selves also as social objects.

The world of physical objects is for consciousness, and not in consciousness. Objects have an existence independent of consciousness.

How does the subjective consciousness perceive the object that is outside it and different from it? Visistadvaita explains it thus: The ultimate explanation of the subject-object relation is afforded by the religious insight that the real object of every judgment is the Brahman that is in everything as its inner self. When one says 'I think', it really means that 'the Brahman thinks in one as one's self'. The Brahman as finite intelligence is the *pries* and pre-supposition of finite thought, and has more affinity with it than with external things.

## ***Dharmabhuta-jnaana* (Phenomenological Consciousness)**

*Dharmabhuta-jnaana*, attributive knowledge, is the foundational truth of the Visistadvaita theory of knowledge. It throws light on the nature of reality, and is well expounded in *Yatindramatadeepika*. It explains cosmic consciousness, self-consciousness and the Brahman-consciousness.

Consciousness, according to this theory, cannot be aware of itself. It presupposes a self of which it is the idea or attribute. *Jnaana* is not identical with reality or the self. The two are separate, but not separable. If being and knowing are identical, the theory of knowledge or epistemology is identical with the theory of being or ontology. In such an event, there is no need for theorizing activity at all. In other words, if 'what is' is in itself, then there is no 'ism' as a metaphysical explanation of 'what is'.

The alternative that knowing is entirely unrelated to being is equally inadmissible, as it would lead to skepticism. If there is self-discrepancy between thought as 'what' and reality as 'that', thought can never grasp reality or get merged in it. The method of negation, *neti* that distills pure consciousness from abstract consciousness is a denial of consciousness itself. The method of negation has nothing to do with doubting knowledge and denying it.

It is wrong in monistic philosophy to start with doubt and end with denial. The monist denies the reality of an external object, and declares the percept as a false appearance projected by the mind, which is itself unreal. This is how he considers that the conscious subject within perceives what is external to it. This view is allied to skepticism. It is sterile.

The act of denial at least exists as an act. If it is regarded as an illusion, the illusion exists as a fact. If it is causally explained, it leads to the fallacy of infinite regress. It is difficult for the monist to explain how the illusion arises. If it is explained as the result or effect of a cause like *avidya*, the origin of this *avidya* crops up for explanation.

The statement that nothing exists assumes the conceivability of something, which it denies. Thought constitutes reality as its inner quality, and is not superimposed on it. The fact that something exists affirms a quality of that something. 'What is' has a quality apart from its existence. But a quality cannot exist by itself and be its own predicate. As such it presupposes a substance of which it is a quality. A substance is of a quality, and is not a quality or an aggregate of qualities.

If monism affirms mere being or substance, and denies its having qualities, in other words, predication and determination, it encounters phenomenalism, which admits qualities but denies substance. Even monism is constrained to concede the truth of substance and qualities when it refers to the *asraya* or *adhishthana* as the locus of illusion.

*Dharma*, quality presupposes *dharmin*, the substance. And *dharmin* presupposes *dharma*. The denial of the one is the denial of the other. Such denial is opposed to all *pramanas*, instruments of knowledge.

When substance is *svaprakasa*, self-illuminated, it is called *ajada*. It is different from *jada* like the world of space and time. *Ajada* is consciousness with content classified into *pratyak*, conscious-self existing by itself. Its knowledge, *parak* (existing for another) is its essential quality, *dharmabhuta-jnaana*.

Substance as *ajada* is conceived as a conscious self, finite or infinite. It is the subject of experience that has *jnaana* as its inseparable attribute. *Atman* is and has consciousness. It is substantive intelligence, and has attributive intelligence as well, manifesting its nature. There can be logical distinction between the two, but no division or separation.

*Dharmabhuta-jnaana* is *svayam-prakasa*, self-illuminated. It illumines objects, *artha-prakasa*. It is also called *mati*, *prajnaa*, *semusi* as well as *samvit*. It can reveal itself and objects. But it is only revelatory and is not self-realized like the *atman*. It is midway between *cetana* and *jada*, as it manifests itself and objects as *cetana*, and is, for another, *acetana*. It is like physical light which can only 'show but not know'. It exists in the self and is sustained by its intelligence.

The relation between the *atman* and its *jnaana* is like that between light and its luminosity. The self is a knowing subject and is not mere intelligence. It is not true to say that intelligence is creation of *ajnaana*, ignorance. *Jnaana* is self-originated and self-valid. We can think away all things, but cannot think away thought or *jnaana*.

In affirming the 'I' in the judgment 'I am conscious', consciousness is predicated of the self that is affirmed. But it does not imply the identity of being and knowing. The self that exists and is conscious is not mere consciousness. *Jnaana* explains itself and things, as an act of inner necessity. It is the idea that interacts with the things, and makes the world of nature intelligible. It imparts meaning and value to *buddhi* and other mental states, which are the modifications of *jnaana*, and not its creations. *Jnaana* thus illumines and explains reason and understanding, and perception and sensation. Besides, it is self-explanatory.

*Jnaana* functions in the empirical states through the medium of *manas* or the auxiliary cause. It is often identified with *manas* as a matter of convention, *upacara*. All states of consciousness from the lowest instinct to the highest state of *bhakti* (devotion) including *viveka* (discrimination), *pratyaksa* (perception), *anumana* (inference) and *sabda* (scriptural faith) are only *avastas* (modifications) of *jnaana*. *Jnaana* has the character of revealing objects. It thus reveals the knowledge of things in the external world.

In the *samsara* (empirical) state of the *jiva*, *jnaana* radiates from the centre and illumines the objects through the medium of the senses. *Jnaana* is as real as the object known for the reason that there is no barrier between the subjective and the objective.

The object is not a mental construction, creation or shadow of the idea. The idea is also not a faint copy or duplicate of the object. This is for the reason that *jnaana* is both capable of illumining itself and illumining objects. The view that the self-consciousness of the self is the source of all mental states and that it is its nature to reveal external objects has the merit of simplicity. It is a true test of truth, and affords a basis for reconciliation of the claims of realism and idealism.

Sensation has a metaphysical foundation in the self, and the self itself has its meaning and value in its inner self. Visistadvaita prefers the method of tracing psychology to metaphysics and religion, to the reverse process of deriving religion and metaphysics from psychology.

The self is *cit-ruupa*. It is of the nature of consciousness. It has *caitanya* or consciousness for its essential quality. While the finite self is *anu* (infinitesimal) in nature, its consciousness is *vibhu*, all pervasive and infinite. While the self abides in its being, its

consciousness is expansive without limit. Its consciousness mirrors the whole universe as its content.

During the phenomenal state of *samsara*, *jnaana* is causally determined by the moral law of *avidya-karma*, and is limited in the embodied state. Consciousness, which is capable of becoming infinite, is spatialized, cribbed and confined. It is this finitized existence of *jnaana* that accounts for the difference in the states of the *jiva* from the most humble to Brahma.

In the noumenal state of *mukti* (liberation), *jnaana* is infinite consciousness and all pervasive. It is then free from the contractions of *karma*. It is co-terminus with cosmic consciousness and God-consciousness. While the self is immutable and eternal, its consciousness changes. But it endures through time and persists even in dreamless sleep, swoon or senselessness as is evidenced in the experience 'I slept well'.

In sleep, the revelatory nature of *jnaana* is overpowered by *tamas*, but is not absent. Its light is hidden, and is not revealed. The witness consciousness in sleep is the witness of something. Consciousness is continuous, distinct and clear in the waking state, dim and confused in the subconscious and dream states, and divine in *mukti* (liberation). It is implied in sleep and stupor. Its non-experience in sleep does not prove its non-existence. The fact of memory supports this view.

The self persists in its subjective modification as a pervading identity. While it illumines other objects, they do not illumine it. Further, the three states of consciousness are continuous, and are not self-contradictory. It is not correct to explain youth as the contradiction of childhood, and overcome by manhood. The three states are different phases of a being in a single life having the same biological end. They are not three discrepant unrels. Even monism admits the coexistence of the

self as witness consciousness and the *antahkarana*, and that the self persists in the non-dual experience of sleep.

The differences are to be accounted for psychologically as the changing states of the same self and its consciousness, because of its being affected by *avidya-karman*. The un-manifest state of *jnaana* is not *ajnaana* or illusion, but *jnaana* as essence or real possibility.

With the lifting of *avidya* and the contractions of *karman*, *jnaana* wakes to itself, expands and shines in its infinite and eternal splendour. It then radiates its light everywhere. It mirrors forth the universe from its own point of view. Then perceptual and inferential knowledge expands into full integral experience. The *jiva* then becomes free of matter and evolves into the Iswara state of cosmic consciousness. The *jnaana* of Iswara, unlike that of bound *jiva*, is ever all pervasive.

The idea of the finite self with infinite consciousness as its essential and eternal nature is not inconceivable. Even absolutism is constrained psychologically to posit the existence of infinity of finite selves, *nanajiva*. The Visistadvaita theory of *jnaana* has the merit of recognizing the reality of the finite and the infinite, and reconciling the claims of pluralism and monism. The infinite pervades the finite, and removes its exclusive feeling of individualism. By knowing the one, we know the other. The intelligence of the *jiva*, finite and infinite, has its home in the absolute intelligence of the Brahman. Thus the theory of *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* mediates between the finite and the infinite, and traces spiritual consciousness to the Brahman.

*Dharmabhuta-jnaana*, besides illuminating itself and the objects of nature, is also substance-attribute (*dravya-guna*). Light (*prabha*) illumines objects and is a quality inhering in the substance. At the same time, it is a substance. Similarly, the term *jnaana*

expresses an essential and eternal attribute that inheres in the self. But it contracts or expands like a substance, owing to the determining influence of *karma*. So it is the substratum of change. As such it is liable to be defined as a substance as well.

Eternal consciousness changes when it is caught up in the world of *karma*. But when freed from sense contact, it comes true to itself in the state of *mukti*, liberation. *Jnaana* is thus both changing and changeless, and is both substance and quality. It is the peculiar spiritual quality of the *atman*, and is contrasted with the qualities of objects or their secondary sensations. *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* is thus a mediating link between the changeless state of reality and the changing phenomenal states.

*Jnaana* is unitary though it realizes itself in various mental modifications starting with the animal instincts and ending with the divine impulse of *bhakti*, devotion. *Jnaana* functions as conation and feeling. As such, every state of consciousness is cognitive, conative and affective. It contains within itself the principle of self-differentiation and self-activity. *Jnaana* is not an abstract thought, but is a mode of thinking with infinite variations. It is not the sum of mental processes or an identity that pervades the differences. It is the self-same consciousness that exhibits itself, though in different forms, owing to the influence of *avidya-karma*. It is the mother of metaphysics.

## ***Svarupa-jnaana* (Existential Consciousness) & *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* (Phenomenological Consciousness) – Interrelationship**

The concepts of *Svarupa-jnaana* and *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* throw considerable light on the knowledge situation. *Svarupa-jnaana* is the *atman*. *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* is described as working through mind and the senses. It is everything that is said to be internal except the *atman* and mind.

*Dharmabhuta-jnaana* and *Svarupa-jnaana* are in essence one and the same, and also are distinct as in the reflective consciousness ‘I-know that I-know X’. When I see a star, it is not merely my *dharmabhuta-jnaana* that becomes one with the existence of the star. In the live act of perception, both the consciousnesses unite. But in reflection, *svarupa-jnaana* can transcend the identity and make it its own object. The *dharmabhuta-jnaana* is only the outward going force of the *svarupa-jnaana*. It is part and parcel of the latter and can be assimilated to it. The complete disappearance of *dharmabhuta-jnaana* in deep sleep is complete withdrawal into *svarupa-jnaana* as structured by our finitude. The *dharmabhuta-jnaana* does not reveal the existential at the time that it reveals an object. But the presence of the existential in the act of seeing and locating the object is revealed in the reflective consciousness through the transcendence of the witness consciousness.

In fact, the light, which reveals the object through the *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, is the borrowed light of the existential. In other words, it is the light, which is the *svarupa-jnaana* that reveals the object through the *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, which is a form of activity of the *svarupa-jnaana* (*atman*).

It is for this reason that we do not know ourselves when we are focused on the object and know the object. Although *dharmabhuta-jnaana* denotes something substantive, it is

essentially the form of the activity of the *atman*, one of the types of its becoming.

Thus, the *atman* as *svarupa-jnaana* cannot be excluded from the *dharmabhuta-jnaana* which itself is a function, power, force of the former. The *dharmabhuta-jnaana* has, therefore, directedness towards the object, gross or subtle, or even an idea, or a mental image. Direction has necessarily two terms, that from which and that to which it points. Then the two terms must have been included in the direction of the *dharmabhuta-jnaana*. They have to be inseparable from the consciousness. This direction or directedness is not that of an empty or lifeless relation. It is that of a concrete, living process. It is a case of the concrete, factual, experimental, not merely that of an abstract symbol as in formal logic or mathematics.

Indeed, the *dharmabhuta* (attribute) *jnaana*, in a sense, flows through the inner sense (*antahkarana*) and the senses. But they are not patterns external to it. They constitute the very form of the attribute consciousness. They are constituent to it, as its patterns of active directedness, not static or inactive. Thus, the independence of *prakrti* from the *dharmabhuta-jnaana* of either the Supreme Spirit or the finite *atman* is not tenable.

The *atman* absorbs its attribute consciousness and has infinite power or potency to do so. This is to say that the directed knowing (I-know) is absorbed into being (I-am), the phenomenological into the existential consciousness.

A question arises whether the individual *atmans* (the *atmans* of finite individuals) as existential consciousnesses (*svarupa-jnaana*) can ultimately remain independent of one another. Empirically, in the world of action, they are often independent, that is, separate, although dependent on one another in practical life. The question is whether they remain separate and be many, through all the transcendental stages. If the Logos and Its various levels are the same for every individual, constituting the stages of

his higher self, is it possible that at these transcendental stages all the *atmans* are separate and not one?

In Indian philosophy or thought, the question whether something remains so and so ultimately is considered from the point of view of what it will be in liberation. The presumption is that, in the liberated state, everything assumes its absolutely original form.

If the phenomenological (attribute) consciousnesses are each infinite by nature, overlapping, interpenetrating, conscious, and conscious of one another, it is not intelligible that they can be separate. If I know whatever is happening in another's mind, his thinking, his pains and pleasures without his telling me, then there is nothing to separate him from me. Both of us have to be identical. But that does not happen.

Regarding sensations and sense data, one may say that there is privacy of experience. However, we cannot be so sure about the privacy of sensations as we can be of pains, pleasures, mental images, illusions, dreams etc although, all are experiences. If X says "I am in pain", I know and the doctor knows that X is in pain. It does not mean that I and the doctor experience the same pain which X experiences. Still our experience, that X experiences pain, is real.

The sensations and the senses are different as belonging to different persons. The *atmans* are each infinite and even the attribute consciousnesses of each are infinite. Yet the sensations and the senses overlap and are different without becoming numerically identical. How are we then to account for the identity of the object? In the case of the pain of X, if the object of sensation is not the same for three of us, there will be no identity of the object in perception. If the senses present sensations (sense data), mind their unity as an object as a whole, then what is it in us that presents the identity?

The Upanisads mention the inward structure of the self – senses, life, mind, individual reason, Cosmic Reason and the *atman* in that ascending order. We may have to say that it is the Cosmic Reason, which has to be the same, numerically identical, in all of us. It is what finally confers existence on all the phenomenal objects in so far as they are real. The Cosmic Reason in all of us must be the same and also must be above the impurities of individual reasons. It has to be the higher aspect or dimension of the individual reason and has also to be its deeper aspect or dimension. The numerical sameness of the object we contend for can be made possible only by something numerically the same for all in our inner beings. Hence, in spite of overlapping of experiences, it cannot be contended that we can be different persons all the way up to the individual *atmans*. It ends at the stage of the Cosmic Reason before the *atman* in each individual. Existence is only one. Ontologically, all existences, all beings of both God and the finite individuals are one. Only empirically in the world of action, are they different.

The phenomenological (attribute) consciousness is structured and directed. It has intentionality. The structure of the phenomenal world is due to the structure of the phenomenological consciousness in so far as it works rightly. This consciousness is said to be outward like the Eternal Force (*nitya-vibhuthi*). The two forms of consciousness – of the *atman* and of God – are said to be inward, called the existential consciousness, *svarupa-jnaana*.

Now in the *atman's* act of cognizing an object, how are the two forms – the inward and the outward related? The answer may be that the same *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, when it reveals an object, reveals itself to the *atman*. For revealing itself to the *atman*, which is inward, it must have inward directedness, and for revealing the object, it must have outward directedness. Then, the so-called inward and outward directedness are not absolute distinctions, but are two intentionalities of the same consciousness, that is, the *dharmabhuta-jnaana*. The *atman* is conscious of the *dharmabhuta-jnaana* belonging to it like heat of fire. It is the power of the *atman*

or the *svarupa-jnaana* itself. Without *svarupa-jnaana* in the background, *dharmabhuta-jnaana* cannot be phenomenological.

In the final analysis, my *dharmabhuta-jnaana* is my rational consciousness with directions outwards and inwards. It is finally to be absorbed, assimilated to and made part of my being, my I-am which will be the true indeterminate consciousness (*jnaana*). It is infinite, without contours and fully restful.

The *svarupa-jnaana* is revealed not only by the phenomenological when it reveals an object, but is cognized by itself. Its cognition of itself is not like revealing an object by the *dharmabhuta-jnaana*; *svarupa-jnaana* is not an object of the phenomenological like the book on the table. The phenomenological is known as another to the *svarupa-jnaana*, but also as being covered, comprehended and within the *svarupa-jnaana*. It is like my body being an object of my consciousness, but my consciousness extending beyond my body.

### 3. The Theory of Judgment

Every judgment is the affirmation of reality, and not the apprehension of identity, devoid of content or differentiation. Thought qualifies reality. It presupposes the distinction between the subject and the object of the judgment. Judgment, as an act of predication, is the fundamental principle of philosophic logic. The two elements of subject and predicate are integrally united, and not isolated bits, or opposite.

If thought is identical with reality, the process of judging becomes tautological. There may be no need for it. But if thought is opposed to reality and cannot reach it, it becomes useless and irrelevant to knowledge. The only way of solving the problem lies in the affirmation that reality is knowable by thought on account of their inseparable relation, and of the logical faith in the reality of predication as a subject-object relation. Reality is, therefore, determinate, and not indeterminate.

Consciousness abstracted from the knowing self, or the subject and the object, is inconceivable and, therefore, non-existent. If consciousness as such is self-proved, it has at least the quality of being self-proved. If it can be argued that pure consciousness remains identical with itself when *jnaana* dispels *ajnaana*, or *ajnaana* destroys itself, it is justifiable to say that self-consciousness cannot be sublated, and the self remains an eternal subject and cannot have antecedent or consequent non-existence.

Judgment is the unity, which explains the different elements. It does not explain them away. The two are correlated and distinguishable elements of knowledge. Determination is not negation. But negation is determination, and acquires positive meaning in a judgment by defining its nature. It presupposes self-determination.

Substance as an entity is an empty abstraction if it is devoid of content. Substance is not the mere aggregate of attributes. On the other hand, it is their organic unity and underlying reality. The distinction between the indeterminate perception and the determinate perception is not a difference in kind between the undifferentiated and the differentiated. Both are complex presentations.

Knowledge, even in the form of primitive sensation, is significant. It is in the nature of judgment. It is a development of the objective. The indefinite becomes the definite and clear. The substance-quality relation is implicit in the former, and explicit in the latter. If the first is bare identity, it is non-relational and no amount of subsequent knowledge can introduce difference into it. But, as a matter of fact, the first called *prathama-pinda-grahana* is the absence, not of difference and discrimination altogether, of some specific difference as 'this is such', and is articulate. The second called *dviteeya-pinda-grahana* is the extension of what is already affirmed of the generic character of a class.

The first judgment 'this is a table' is indefinite, but not indeterminate. The second 'this is also a table' is revival based on similarity of structure. Both are *savisesa*, and not *nirvisesa*. Every judgment is in the form 'this is such' in which the predicate qualifies the subject. There is no distinction drawn between what is given and its extension.

What is immediate knowledge is, by its own necessity, mediated. We give a reason for what is immediately felt. When we say that there is fire, we try to give a reason for the assertion. In every judgment, extent and intent go together. The *jati* or genus is realized in the *vyakti* or individual owing to the intimate structural similarity of pattern, *samsthana*. Therefore, *samanya* or genus is practically the same as *samsthana*, and is structured.

Thus there is no contradiction between *savikalpaka-jnaana* and *nirvikalpaka-jnaana*. Two different things are contradictory only when they stand in the same relation to the same object. But different qualities of whiteness and redness may coexist in the same object like cow. To say that there is being as such without any quality is the result of progressive abstraction. It is not correct to say that the first perception is knowledge of pure being, *nirvisesa-cinmatra*. A pure sensation as such is psychologically impossible.

Even in a perceptive judgment like ‘this is a pot’, the factors of knowledge can be distinguished. They are all equally real, even though their values differ. The perceived object, in its presentness, is a given spot in the world of space-time, which is in sensuous contact with the percipient subject, the sensitive self. The percipient subject comes into contact with the particular spot, which is only a this-now. The judging activity belongs to *jnaana*, which illumines the world of mind and of nature. In this case, it reveals the external object, which is the illumined spot, the focus of attention.

The sensitive self is the spiritual *atman* different from the body, the senses, *manas* and *jnaana*. The *atman* is self-revelatory as well as self-realized. It is the subject of every kind of knowledge. But the ultimate subject of knowledge is the inner self of all thinking beings.

Thus the logical subject is *jnaana*; the philosophical subject is the *atman* or *dharmin* behind *dharma*; and the subject of the religious consciousness is the *Paramatman*. The *Paramatman* is the whole reality that enters into the *atman* as its self, and then enters into the world of nature as its source and centre. Thus every term, thought and thing ultimately connotes the Brahman on account of Its all-pervasive character. This is only from the connotative point of view as the Brahman, *cit* or *ksetrajna*, and *acit* or *ksetra* are ultimate reals. They are, therefore, different denotatively.

The subject of grammar in a sentence is different from the subject of logic of the proposition. The subject of grammar refers to reality qualified by difference in the light of the principle of grammar related to words in a sentence, *samanadhikaranya*. It conveys the idea of one thing qualified by several attributes. The words denote the same thing, but connote its different qualities. It is the application to one thing of several words, for the application of each of which there is a different purpose.

In the sentence ‘this is a tree’, the terms ‘this’ and ‘tree’ stand for an individual and a class. They have different respective functions, *bhinna-pravrtti-nimitta*. But they refer to the same thing. In the sentence ‘this is green’, the *guna*, quality ‘greenness’ in ‘this’ refers to the same subject of discourse.

It is true that contradictories cannot coexist at the same time and in the same context. But distinct qualities may coexist side by side as different qualities of the same object. The judgment ‘this person is that Ram’ connotes the same individual existing in two different contexts, and not absolute identity or non-difference. A judgment is a connected idea referring to reality. The sentence ‘this person is that Ram’ explicitly refers to personal identity and means that Ram-*tva*, in a particular former context, belongs to him in the present context.

The Advaita interpretation of the theory of *samanadhikaranya* in terms of absolute identity is untenable as the implied affirmation of such identity cuts at the very root of grammatical construction. To speak of bare identity as the implied sense or *lakṣya* as opposed to the apparent sense or *mukhya-vrtti* really implies nothing, and applies to nothing. Similarly, the interpretation of the principle in terms of difference between subject and predicate as mere otherness has no meaning. Identity in difference is also impossible as the two are self-contradictory.

The principle of coordination is ultimately the relation between *prakara* and *prakarin*. In the sentence 'the cow is white', whiteness depends for its meaning on the subject with which it is inseparably related. The quality is, therefore, termed the *prakara* or mode of the substance, *prakarin*. Similarly, the sentence 'he is Ram, a man' implies that the body is a mode or *prakara* of the self, which animates it. Therefore, the term connoting the body connotes also the self, and ultimately, all terms referring to things and thinking beings are used in coordination with their inner self or the Brahman. Therefore, they extend their meaning up to the self, which is their *prakarin*. Every kind of knowledge, perceptive, inferential or scriptural, refers to the ultimate knower or subject. *Atman* alone is the inner meaning of all experience.

## 4. The Theory of Relations

Philosophical logic is based on the truths of determinate knowledge, *savisesa-jnaana* and the principle of *samanadhikaranya*. It throws light on the problem of external and internal relations.

In the theory of external relations, the relations are said to make no difference to the terms related. The objects are external to the relation, and one substance does not pass into and become another. What exists alone is cognized. Knowledge is the awareness of external objects by the knowing subject, and such experience makes no difference to the existing objects.

The external objects are given not as things, but as objects to a subject. They form the *ksetra*. They do not depend on the self or *ksetrajna* for their existence. *Cit*, the percipient self, and *acit*, the perceived object, are externally connected, mutually exclusive and eternally real.

Knowledge presupposes not only the independence of the subject and the object, but also the existence of plurality of knowing subjects and knowable objects. The self is not always the subject of knowledge as, in social relations, each self is both subject and object. Inter-subjective intercourse and social concern for one another would be impossible if there is no subject-object relation among different persons.

If the object is considered outside there, outside the mind, it cannot be known. Similarly if the subject is inside, it is shut up in itself. Thus, there is no way of escape from skepticism on the one hand and subjectivism on the other. To avoid these pitfalls, the theory of external relations and epistemological realism is to be restated in terms of the logic of *aprthak-siddha-visesana*, inseparable attributes and the theory of ontological non-dualism.

For example, the relation between the hand and the pen is external. But the relation between the hand and the fingers is internal and organic. Externality implies the reality of the eternal differences of the facts of *cit* and *acit*. But in relation to the whole, which is their inner essence, they become inseparable and correlative factors. As such they lose their independence and exclusiveness.

Thus the plurality of *cit* and *acit* becomes acceptable while the pluralistic view is rejected. The cosmos is not subject or object, but is subject-object. Appropriately it is defined as universe, but not multi-verse. As parts, *cit* and *acit* are mutually exclusive and indifferent. But as parts of the all-pervasive consciousness of the inner-self, which sustains them, they are internally and organically related.

Qualities and relations depend on the whole of reality as their background. Internal relations are grounded in the nature of the terms related not as separate terms as such, but as terms connoting the ultimate ground of existence and experience as *visista* and *visesya*. The *visesana* is an attribute of the *visesya* or adjective of the whole. It is vitally related to it as its mode or *prakara*, like the fragrance and the flower. It is also like the vowel related to the consonant, and the body to its self.

The *visista* is thus not a mechanical whole of indifferent parts. Nor is it the totality of attributes. The judgment 'this rose is fragrant' is not a unity of the substance and its quality, or the subject-object relation, as explained by the *bheda-abheda* theory of the identity and difference. Incidentally, this theory regards identity and difference as two moments of reality. In its philosophic aspect, this view expounds reality as the Absolute consisting of God and the finite centres.

Visistadvaita, however, holds that the Absolute is not God and the finite beings, but is God in the finite beings, as their sustaining ground. While the *visesya* or *prakarin* is one, the *visesanas* or *prakaras* are many. The Brahman and the world are not two, but one, the Brahman in the world.

The metaphysical view of Visistadvaita is opposed to the mathematical view of addition. Likewise, it is different from the adjectival theory of the Absolute, which explains the finite self as the essential quality of the Infinite and its connection of content. The finite self is an inseparable attribute of the Infinite as its *aprthak-siddha-visesana* or *prakara*. At the same time, it is a separate self, persevering in its own being.

The *visesana* is substance and quality, *dravya-guna* like light and its radiation. As quality or mode, it derives its substantiality from the self-effulgent *atman*. But as substance, it has its own monadic being. A quality is quality of a substance. But, when it is also a substance, it admits of relation.

The connection between *atman* and *Paramatman* is not merely the logical view of substance and attribute, but the spiritual view of two selves that are eternally existent. They are not externally related, for *Paramatman* is defined as the inner self and the essence of the *jiva*, its *antaryamin*.

This view avoids the monadic exclusiveness on one hand and the modal inclusiveness on the other. The Visistadvaita insight of the Brahman as the *antaryamin* throws a flood of light even on logical problems, and provides a comprehensive view of reality.

The self and the objects in nature are independent entities existentially, and are externally related. But they have their meaning and value in the Absolute as the All-self, and they are related to It internally as Its modes or *prakaras*. The Absolute is self-related

and has Its own inner identity. At the same time, It is related to *cit* and *acit*, which are Its modes. This interpretation avoids the fallacies of skepticism and of infinite regress.

When Ramanuja says that all knowledge is of the real, *sarvam vijnaana-jaatam yathartham*, he does not accept the realistic contention that knowledge comes from the external object through the sense organ, and the mind passively receives the sense impressions like a blank sheet of paper. The self with its *jnaana* and its psychophysical changes is as real as the external objects or *prakrti* with all its *tattvas*.

Knowledge is revelatory and not representative. As what exists alone is cognized, Ramanuja's view is justified in its conclusion that the existence of a thing is independent of our experience of it. Further there is an external relation between an object and its awareness by the self. The thought of an object is not the object, but is about it. A thing is known as it exists and not otherwise. It is wrong to say that it exists because it is known.

Nature exists for consciousness, and not in consciousness as its idea. If realism, as a philosophy, insists on the primacy of matter over the self, and rules out the role of *jnaana*, it leads to pan-objectivism and lapses into materialism. Idealism is justified if it accepts *dharmabhuta-jnaana* as the presupposition of experience. But it is to be refuted if it ignores the reality of the external object given in sense perception, and explains it as a mental state or construction based on relations either internal or relevant.

If the internal relation alone is accepted, then space, time and causality are *a priori* forms belonging to the very structure of thought superimposed on the manifold of the sense. According to this view, the world seems to be real, and yet is not real. In such a case, there is no difference between waking and dream consciousness. What we know is what we seem to know, and it is

only an 'as if'. Then thought cannot grasp reality, and the theory of knowledge becomes no theory of knowledge.

Sankara is well aware of the defects of extreme idealism. He combats it by admitting the realistic view that the external object is not an idea or a projection of thought. It has an objective reality. The waking state is different in kind from the dream state.

Visistadvaita absolutism checks the extremes of realism and idealism. It points out the defects of the pure object philosophy and the pure subject philosophy by insisting on the reality of *ksetrajna*, the knowing subject and the *ksetra*, the knowable object. It also insists on the correlativity of the subject-object relation and the immanence of the atman in *cit* and *acit*. *Atman* enters into *cit* as itself, enters into the object and then becomes the self of the object.

If the object alone is taken as the real, it leads to the realistic view ending in materialism. If *manas* and *buddhi* are alone considered reality, there is mentalism and rationalism. If the self alone is considered existent, it is monadism or personalism. If the Brahman alone is considered existent, it is a-cosmism. But Visistadvaita accepts all these existents, and assigns a place and value to each one of them. It explains all selves and objects of knowledge as the living embodiments of the inner self.

Visistadvaita thus affirms the duality of the subject-object relation within the unity of experience between the one experiencing and the thing experienced, but denies their dualism. It relies on the eternity of *cit* and *acit* as the one experiencing or the experienced, but abolishes their externality.

## 5. Truth, Error and *Avidya*

### Truth

Visistadvaita accepts the integrity of experience in all its levels as noticed in *pratyaksa* (perception), *anumana* (inference) and *sastra* (scripture). This is on the ground that *jnaana* is self-valid and true, that the *sat* (real) alone is cognized and that there is no knowledge of *asat* (unreal). If the Brahman alone is *satya* (real) and the world of experience is *tuccha* (futile, false) and *mithya* (non-existent) on the ground of the self-contradictions of dualistic knowledge, no knowledge is possible or desirable. Meticulous monistic logic does not admit the coexistence of the Brahman and *maya* or different degrees of reality.

*Maya* is non-existence, as opposed to *sat*. It cannot, therefore, coexist with the Brahman. If *maya* refers to the world of illusion, then it contradicts the theory of degrees of reality, and the truth of two standpoints as the *vyavahaarika* (the world of practical life) and the *paramaarthika*, which is absolutely real.

If truth is self-existent, and the false non-existent, there is no need for a theory of truth or a test of truth based on *abaaadha* (the principle of non-contradiction). Absolutism recognizes the distinction between reality and existence. But this distinction is not an opposition. To Ramanuja, the Brahman is the *sat* or supreme reality that is the pervading essence of the universe, and its indwelling self and it is, therefore, true. The universe is not the Brahman enveloped by *maya* or *avidya*. It is *brahmamaya*, pervaded by the Brahman. Its radiant light illumines it. It exists in the Brahman, and not as the Brahman. Nor does it exhaust its content.

Reality exists as the Brahman as *cit* and *acit*. *Acit* is matter, which is ever-changing and may be called *asatya*. *Cit* is the eternal

self with a uniform nature or intelligence, which is realized as distinct from the ever-changing *prakrti* or matter. It is, therefore, called *satya* or the true, and the inner self of the existent *prakrti*. The Brahman may be called *satyasya-satyam*, the real of all real, the true of the true, Vaasudeva.

Reality and value coexist. Matter has an extrinsic and ephemeral value, while the self has intrinsic value. The self is, therefore, *satya* and matter is *asatya*. The Brahman is the true of the true, and gives value to both. This view repudiates realism, idealism and monism as one-sided and abstract. It recognizes the reality and value of nature, the individual self and the Brahman.

Truth is the knowledge of a thing as it is and as it works, or as it satisfies the practical interests of life. According to Ramanuja, every kind of knowledge is true if it is consistent with experience in its exactitude. He accepts the trustworthiness of the three *pramanas*, namely, *pratyaksa* including *abhaava*, *anumana* including *upamana* and *arthapatti*, and *sabda*.

In *pratyaksa*, the *indriya* (sense organ), in its normal state, has a direct knowledge of the thing as it is. *Anumana* arises from the knowledge of *vyapti* or the invariable concomitance between cause and effect. The inference need not consist of the five senses in all cases. Reasoning is both deductive and inductive. It should be free from prejudice and lead to truth. It should avoid fallacies like contradiction (*viruddha*), unending reasoning (*anyonyasraya*), and infinite regress (*anavasta*).

*Sruti* is verbal testimony. As such it is eternal and impersonal. All its parts are interconnected and have a unity of import. It is, for these reasons, considered true.

All the three *pramanas* are coherent, and they are not contradictory. *Pratyaksa* is the foundation of knowledge.

Reasoning is based on it and does not supercede it. *Sruti* is the consummation of all knowledge. But it cannot be at variance with *pratyaksa*. Truth is an immanent criterion. It includes the more of itself. The three *pramanas*, in their integral unity and perfection, enable the truth-seeker to know the whole of reality.

## Error

According to Ramanuja, truth is revelatory, *svatahpramana*, and cognition is real. Therefore, strictly speaking, there is no need for a theory of truth. Consequently, any theory of error becomes meaningless.

Truth is, in fact, the natural and normal feature of knowledge in the state of spiritual freedom where there is no distinction between *prama*, truth and *bhrama*, error. While the *jnaana* of the self is eternally pure and perfect, and free from *avidya*, the intelligence of the finite self is subject to self-contradictions, and contradictions of *avidya-karman* which deprive it of its pure and all-pervasive character. This privation is called error.

*Jnaana* is normally true cognition. Even a false cognition like the bent stick is perspective and is real. Its extent and variety are determined by the logical and moral development of the self. If error is traced to the fissure between knowing and being, and the self-contradictions of relational experience, and if *avidya* is the obscuring principle of reality, it is not possible for us to go from degrees of truth to the Absolute. Indeed, the Absolute would itself be infected by illusion. The *Advaita* theory of non-contradiction is no theory at all, for it says that error is *abhava* or non-existent, and reality is beyond *prama* and *bhrama*.

Ramanuja's theory of error saves the Absolute from its self-deceptive *maya* or *avidya*, and its illogical appearances. It attributes error to the finite self, which has inexplicably allowed itself to be obscured by *avidya*. According to this theory, every empirical experience is incomplete or partial knowledge. Even *prama* is only partial truth. The distinction between *prama* and *bhrama* is one of degree, and vanishes when *jnaana* is freed from the moral determinations of *karma*.

Visistadvaita utilizes every theory of error, which fits in with its central idea and accepts the tests of pragmatism and realism so far as they go in harmonizing experience. The experience of an object as having gray colour owing to colour-blindness is a psychic fact, and is real. The shade of colouration is an aspect of the spatial order.

The criterion of truth comprises the three theories of coherence, correspondence and workability in so far as they conform to the method of Visistadvaita. There is coherence if the given judgment is consistent with all other judgments and with the whole of knowledge. There is correspondence if there is exact conformity between the object as it is, and its perception by the senses. Knowledge is true if it satisfies the ends of life by its workability. Correspondence thus follows coherence, and verification results from the inner value of truth. Thus pragmatism, realism and idealism are interrelated in the Visistadvaita epistemology.

Falsity is abnormal and pathological as in mental disorders. Each case has to be judged on merits. Error, too, is difficult of classification. But it can be of different types like hallucination, illusion or dream, which may be explained psychologically and by the criteria furnished by pragmatism and realism.

In hallucination, an object is felt to be physically present though there is no such object. An illusion is an erroneous perception in which one thing is mistaken for another. In a dream, one seems to have experience of things, which may not exist in the objective world. A psychologist explains these phenomena in terms of interpretative factors and psychophysical disorder. All these are psychic occurrences and manifestations of *jnaana* that subsist, and are facts of experience that cannot be dismissed as non-existent.

The cause is real; therefore, the effect also is real. For example, the illusion of the double moon is traceable to the distorting medium. In this case, the illusion arises from some defect of the eye or the pressure of the finger on it. The illusion of the white conch seen as yellow is traceable to neural disorder. In this case, the yellowness of the diseased eyeball is transmitted to the conch. One colour of the spectrum is abstracted from the whole, and the experience is purely subjective. The illusion of a continuous circle of light when whirled round is traceable to the law of rapid rotation. In this case, successiveness is omitted, and simultaneity is felt.

In the above mental states, if they do not serve an end and satisfy the needs of practical life (*vyavahaaranuguna*), they are false. In the experience of a mirage, for example, the water element that is seen is apprehended owing to some defect in the eye, and the experience is not verified.

Truth is selective and serviceable. As it promotes the ends of life, it has a pragmatic value. On the other hand, logic is related to psychology. It explains thought as a thinking process, and truth as a practical value. Truth, thus, is what works, but whatever works is not true. Truth is prior to its workability. It is not only *vyavahaaranuguna*, but also *yatharthartha*. It has both conative and cognitive values.

A judgment is true if the idea corresponds to the external object. It is objective in the sense that truth is true for all, and is not personal and private. In accounting for illusions like the snake in the rope, Ramanuja accepts the fundamental unity of nature, *prakrti* as composed of the five elements and the thing-hood of things singled out in the act of sense perception. He defines truth as the apprehension of the dominant and relevant parts of the perceived object, and error as the non-observation of this essential part.

The Upanisadic theory of quintuplication states that every object in nature is composed of the five elements in varying proportions though its thing-hood is largely shaped by one predominant element among the ingredients. In the normal perception of the external objects, *jnaana* reveals only this main part. But, in error, owing to certain psychophysical conditions, the self perceives only the non-essential and insignificant portion of the thing. For example, in the shell-silver illusion, the silver element, which resembles the shell, is singled out from the complex of experience. This experience leads to disillusionment when the silver content is known to have no practical value.

Everything participates in the nature of everything else. All things (*bhautikas*) are composed of all the elements (*bhutas*). The thing-hood of a thing, as part of the whole spatial order, is so complex that the particular sciences (*sastras*) can have only a practical and partial knowledge of those aspects of the thing that are relevant to it. It is only the *jnaanin*, whose *jnaana* is perfected, that can know all things as a whole. His mind transcends the one-to-one relation and acquires knowledge of the whole truth.

But fragmentary knowledge is not a fiction or illusion projected by *avidya*. The reality of nature and its interrelatedness is due to the pervasive character of the *atman* that has entered into it as its self. Even the dream state is a psychic experience, which may be traced to previous experiences registered in the psychophysical complex. Dreams often reveal the character of the dreamer, and sometimes have a prophetic value.

Ramanuja explains dreams morally as the wonderful creation of Iswara in accordance with the merit or demerit of the dreamer. In dreams, the Divinity creates specific objects suited to the specific merit or demerit of the *jiva*. The pleasure or pain experienced in that state is the result of the law of retribution, and is as real as the moral life lived in the waking state. But it is purely

subjective and does not have the objective reality of waking state. The distinction between the subjective and the objective character of experience is only one of degree, and does not affect the reality. The theory of sublation does not apply to these distinct and real experiences.

Epistemology is ultimately founded on the philosophy of religion, which combines validity and value in the concept of the Self as real reality and the true of the true. Thus, all empirical knowledge is a partial revelation of reality, the Self. The distinction between *prama* and *bhrama* (truth and error) is not absolute. When the ideal of knowledge is realized in *mukti*, *jnaana* becomes all-pervasive, and the *mukta* realizes everything. Essence and existence, then, become one.

## *Avidya*

The Advaita theory of *avidya* holds that *avidya* is neither real nor unreal, nor both, and is, therefore, inexplicable. For example, in the illusion caused by mistaking the shell for silver, there is a misunderstanding, which is indeterminable. It is first felt to be real and then rejected as unreal when there is true knowledge of the thing. It cannot be both real and unreal. It is *adhyasa* (false superimposition), for the silver cognition is superimposed on the shell cognition.

The Mimamsa theory of *akhyati* (non-apprehension) accepts the reality of the cognitions, the perceived shell and the conceived silver. It traces the mistake to a defect in the tools of knowledge on account of which we fail to notice that silver is a recollected element.

In the Naiyayika theory of *anyatha-khyati*, both shell and silver are real things. Shell is wrongly perceived as another real object, namely silver. The non-existence of shell means the existence of another object, silver and this error is subjective.

In this regard, Ramanuja's method of verification is pragmatic, but is not consistent. Truth may work, but what works is not necessarily true.

*Avidya*, according to Advaita, is the innate obscuration of pure consciousness, which, somehow, divides the Absolute to distort it into the world of difference. It is an innate error without a beginning, positive and indeterminable. However, *jnaana* can remove it.

The universal experience 'I do not know' refers to ignorance and is indefinite. In sleep where there is a temporary cessation of consciousness of duality and difference, ignorance remains in its

causal state, *karana-sarira*. It is owing to *avidya* that the Brahman, which is *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, is confused with the empirical self, which is *anrta* (transient), *jada* (inert) and *duhkha* (miserable). This state is called *adhyasa*, which is the cause of all the evils of *samsara*.

*Avidya* is thus, according to Advaita, the root of error in philosophy, original confusion or misconception. It is the basis of the baseless world of space-time-cause like the snake in the rope illusion. The Brahman alone is. What is not the Brahman is false as it is different from It as in the snake in the rope illusion.

Difference cannot exist by itself. It is only a distortion of reality. To trace the cause of *avidya* is illegitimate as the concept of causality itself has its origin in *avidya*. Pure consciousness is the locus (*asraya*) of *avidya*, and also its object. It is ever self-effulgent. *Avidya* cannot conceal it. The pure consciousness does not reside in the *jiva*, as the *jiva* itself is its creation. Like the sun that shines unaffected by the mist, the *atman* is self-effulgent, and is not affected by *avidya*.

*Avidya* is somehow there in the Brahman and we do not know why. We do not know it, as thought cannot go beyond thought. *Avidya* is, therefore, indefinable and inexplicable, as it is neither real nor unreal nor both. It is not real as it is dissolved in the state of liberation. It is real, as it now exists. It cannot be both, too. It is a frank admission of the self-contradictions of life, though the Absolute is beyond such discrepancy.

Though *avidya* defies explanation, several theories attempt to explain its origin and nature. According to the Reflection theory, the *jiva* or *ahamkara* is a reflection of the Brahman in the *antahkarana* due to *avidya*, which is the subjective side of *maya*. It makes the world a dream and a delusion, and the *jiva* a mere phantasm.

The Phenomenon theory refutes the Reflection theory. It defines *avidya* as a fact of finiteness, which seeks to limit the unlimited. *Avidya* is a fall from *jnaana*, and is not a fictitious something. The world is unreal but not illusory. The *jiva* is a fact of experience, and not a phantasm. The world has relative reality though its relation to the Absolute cannot be explained.

The third view of *avidya* denies phenomenal reality. It explains the external object as the illusory projection of the perceiving consciousness and makes Iswara Himself a super-*jiva*.

The fourth view denies *avidya* itself, as its recognition as a separate entity is an admission of the reality of two states, *jnaana* and *ajnaana*. The Brahman exists forever. *Avidya* is non-existent like the son of a barren woman.

All the sub-schools of Advaita agree on the whole that it is *avidya*, which is the root cause of all misery and confusion in life. Though it has no beginning, it has an end in liberation, *mukti*. The chief value of the concept of *avidya*, in the philosophy of Advaita, is that it exposes the inadequacy of all dualistic theories, though it remains inexplicable itself.

Ramanuja, in his introduction to his *Sribhashya*, refutes the Advaita theory of *avidya*. His refutation is known as *saptavidha-anupatti* (sevenfold inadmissibility). He levels seven charges to dispute the Advaita theory.

The first charge is that there can be no basis for the baseless fabrication of *avidya*. The illusionist posits a locus, substratum for *avidya*. The seat of *avidya* should be either the *jiva* or the Brahman. But neither is conceivable. It cannot be the *jiva* as the *jiva* itself is the fictitious creation of *avidya*. It cannot be the Brahman as the Brahman is self-illuminated, and can never be enveloped by *avidya*. To trace the locus of *avidya* to the *jiva*, and

that of the *jiva* to *avidya* is to commit the fallacy of mutual dependence (*anyonyaasraya*). *Avidya* has no resting place, and is, therefore, nothing.

The second charge is that there can be really no obscuration (*tirodhana*) of the Brahman at all. *Brahmasvarupa* is *jnaana* and is self-luminous. Either it is pure consciousness or nothing. If it is pure consciousness, it cannot be obscured, obstructed or destroyed by nescience. On the other hand, if it is covered by *avidya*, it is virtually destroyed by it. How or why does self-effulgence veil itself?

The third charge relates to the understanding of the nature of *avidya*. *Avidya* is either real or unreal. If it is an entity (*bhavarupa*), then it is inherent in the Brahman as *mulavidya*, and cannot be destroyed. If it is unreal, there is no *mulavidya* or *tulaavidya* as one or many.

The fourth charge is against the *anirvacaniya* theory of indefinability. Theorizing activity is actually the work of thought. To say that there is a theory, which is undefinable, carries no meaning. If *avidya* is an indeterminable something infecting reality, it is something that can never be sublated. The *advaitin* first explains *avidya* as a phenomenon, then as an illusion, and finally as an indeterminable. This kind of explanation is not acceptable.

The fifth charge is that the theory of *avidya* is not substantiated by any *sastra* or *pramana*. Illusion is an abnormal phenomenon and it is opposed to the first principles of philosophy to treat the abnormal as the starting point. The terms *asatya* (unreal) and *naasti* (is not) as opposed to *satya* (real) and *asti* (is) refer not to the unreal or the non-existent, but to non-sentient objects.

The sixth charge is that *ajnaana* cannot be sublated or dispelled by *jnaana*. If it is something arising or given, it can be

removed only by spiritual discipline, and not by the mere knowledge of self-identity. If the Brahman is ever existent and *avidya* non-existent, then the term *mumuksutva* carries no meaning at all.

The seventh charge relates to the Advaita theory of liberation. For the *advaitins*, *brahmajnaana* is not the *jnaana* of the Brahman but it is the *jnaana*, the Brahman. The *advaitins* argue that *jnaana* stultifies *ajnaana*, and then stultifies itself. If so, *jnaana* is an act of spiritual suicide. With the dissolution of *avidya*, *jagat* and Iswara no more exist, and Advaita turns to be nihilism.

Vedanta Desika, the follower of Ramanuja, elaborates the charges further. According to him, from the standpoint of epistemology, the theory of *avidya* and *adhyasa* leads to agnosticism and skepticism. If the Brahman is ever self-realized, there is no need for a philosophy to expound it. If the Brahman cannot be the object of knowledge, the *mumuksu* cannot seek it. If whatever knowable is false, the Brahman is also false. The indeterminate has the quality of being indeterminate. But to say that it transcends all relational thought including Vedic knowledge is to commit intellectual suicide and *sruti-cide*. The theory of knowledge is thus the theory of the denial of knowledge.

He argues that the monistic ontology of *Nirguna* Brahman as pure consciousness without any content borders on nihilism. *Nirguna* Brahman has the quality of being *nirguna*. Consciousness cannot be aware of itself without the self as its subject. Advaita fails to explain the relation between the one and the many, being and becoming, affirmation and negation, and the absolute and the relative. Difference cannot be denied without denying identity, as the two are relative.

Advaita cosmology suffers from the defects of pan-illusionism and a-cosmism. If the Brahman, the subject or

substratum, is real, the universe is equally real and not an illusion. If the universe is an illusion, the Brahman is also illusory as the Brahman is conditioned by it. Nescience is an inexplicable something, and the distinction between *maya* and *avidya* is meaningless. To say that the world is a magic show created by the *mayin* makes the creator a conjurer. If the effect is an illusion superimposed on the cause, the cause is also infected.

The psychology of Advaita is equally defective, for it virtually refutes the existence of the *jiva* and is engulfed in subjectivism. The denial of many selves on logical grounds is also the denial of even the single-self theory. If the self that has consciousness is false, consciousness itself is false. There is no need for the theory of *saaksin*, as the self, as a knowing entity, serves its purpose.

Advaita ethics brings out the discrepancy between *karma* and *jnaana*, as it stresses that the pure consciousness sublates the moral ego, and transcends the distinction between good and evil. In Advaita, religion occupies a position subordinate to philosophy. The god of religion is said to be less than the Absolute, owing to the discrepancy between two wills, finite and infinite. In such an event, religion gets sublated in philosophy, and has no meaning at all.

*Jnaana* is said to dispel the dualistic consciousness arising from *avidya*. But even *jnaana* results from *ajnaana*, and is not different from it. *Jivanmukta* is self-contradictory, as *jivatman* with embodied-ness cannot coexist with *mukti*. This is for the simple reason that *mukti* itself is freedom from embodied-ness. *Mukti* cannot admit of degrees, stages and divisions. If the *jiva* is identical with Iswara, then *mukti* is absolute. In such a case, there can no longer be any question of other *jivas* and Iswara existing in the empirical state of *avidya* and *maya*. Further, the world process should cease to exist after the first instance of *jivanmukti*. But it

continues. If *avidya* or *maya* is ultimately non-existent and the Brahman is ever identical with Itself, there is no problem for the *mumuksu* and, therefore, no need for *mukti*. Thus, according to Vedanta Desika, Advaita is found to be inconsistent with every kind of *pramana*.

Ramanuja sums up the defects of the monistic theory of *avidya* ending in the philosophy of *eka-jiva* thus: 'From the standpoint of pure consciousness, everything is false. *Sastra* is false; the knowledge derived from the *sastra* is false; and the *guru-disciple* relation is false. The idea that everything is false arises from the falsity of *sastra* itself.'

This refutation of Advaita leads him to the reconstruction of philosophy in terms of *sat-khyati* or *yatharthakhyati*. It affirms that what exists (*sat*) is alone known. Reality is always *savisesa* and not *nirvisesa*. In comprehending a thing as it is, we comprehend what it is. The 'what' qualifies the 'that'.

*Sat-khyati* is not realism in its modern sense as it insists on the reality of nature in all its aspects – physical, spiritual and the divine. It is, indeed, *sad-vidya* – that by knowing the one all is known (*eka-vijnanena sarva-vijnanam*). By knowing the Brahman, the ground of the universe, the universe also is known. The Brahman ensouls the universe. It comes from *sat*, not *asat*, and, therefore, is *sat*. The Brahman is one as the *prakarin*, and the many as the *prakaras*; and both are real.

Nature and the community of the *jivas* derive their meaning and value from the Brahman who is the inner self of all. Therefore, everything, thought and word, ultimately connotes the Brahman. Thus, by knowing the one who knows the many as its *visesana*, *prakara* or *sarira* and, by knowing the many, we know the one that is changeless and eternal.

Ramanuja thus argues that as the Brahman is real, the world also is real and true. He equates *avidya* ethically with *karman* and concludes that the *jiva* freed from *avidya-karman* sees all things in the Brahman and the Brahman in all things.

## 6. *Saguna* Brahman

Of all the Vedanta schools, Advaita alone makes a distinction between *Saguna* Brahman and *Nirguna* Brahman on the authority of the Sruti and the Brahmasutras. To substantiate this dual view, Sankara relies on the Vedantasutras dealing with *sadvidya*, *anandamaya*, *ubhayalinga* and *karya*-Brahman *adhikaranas*.

According to Sankara, the *sadvidya* brings out the contrast between the *Sat* without a second, the indeterminate, and Iswara, the determinate. The *Sat* is *advitiya* (without a second), and *nirguna*. The moment it wills the many and becomes the manifold, it is said to entangle itself in the illusions of relatedness. Caught up, as it were, in the duality of the subject-object relation, It becomes Iswara, the determinate. Determination is negation. Therefore, according to Sankara, *Saguna* Brahman is finite and is a mere appearance. But *Nirguna* Brahman is pure undifferentiated being or consciousness without the distinction of subject and object.

Second, according to monists, the Brahman as *anandamaya* is *saguna*, the logical highest made in the moulds of thought. 'The moment we think of the Brahman, *ananda* lapses into *vijnaana* and the not-self enters into the integrity of being, and makes it being-becoming' in the words of S. Radhakrishnan. The Absolute as the intuitional Highest becomes Iswara as Its highest conceptual being. Predication as a logical relation perverts reality. When the bliss of the Brahman is logically defined as blissfulness, it is only maximum bliss with an element of imperfection. In *Saguna* Brahman, there is a 'balance of pleasure over pain'. But it is not absolute bliss.

Third, in the *ubhayalingadhikarana*, Sankara makes the same distinction. Logically, the Brahman cannot, at the same time, be transcendently formless being, and phenomenalized Iswara,

on account of the self-contradiction of the finite-infinite, inherent in the dual idea. The *neti* method denies only the pluralistic consciousness fictitiously superimposed on the Brahman, and not the Brahman Itself. If there were to be denial of the Brahman, it is total nihilism and a stultification of Vedanta. The formless, characterless Brahman is, however, spatialized and personalized by the religious consciousness in the interests of devout meditation.

Fourth, the Brahman is apprehended metaphysically as the self-identical Absolute, and is the metaphysical Highest. The Highest is not Iswara or *Karya*-Brahman who is the God of theology. It is only the effected Brahman that has a world of His own which is attained by devotion. Spatial and temporal categories apply to the empirical world and cannot have a transcendental use. The metaphysician rejects the illusions of space and time, and the values of progress and attainment. *Nirguna* Brahman is a-logical, a-moral and impersonal. According to Sankara, the idea of the *Saguna* Brahman is only a concession to ignorance.

Except absolute monists, all Vedantins repudiate the theory of *Nirguna* Brahman and uphold the reality of *Saguna* Brahman. For them, the *Saguna* Brahman in the *bhinna-abhinna* relation does justice to the philosophic aspects of identity and difference. Even Sankara accepts that the Brahman, though *nirguna*, can be considered *saguna*, though at a relatively lower level than the Absolute, to satisfy the religious consciousness of the spiritual seekers. Ramanuja is the foremost to uphold the concept of *Saguna* Brahman which is the basis of Visistadvaita.

According to Visistadvaita, the Absolute is not an altar to an unknown god. It is the Infinite that expresses Itself as the finite, as its informing self with a view to infinitize it. The Vedantasutras begin with the philosophic definition of the Brahman as the ground or reason of finite existence, and end with the knowledge of the Brahman as the goal of spiritual experience. The *sadvidya* enquires

into the meaning of sat as the ultimate fact of knowledge, and concludes that the sat without the second is the supreme self and is the home of the eternal values of life.

The Taittiriya Upanisad states that the Brahman is *anandamaya*. This is in the nature of an aesthetic description of the abounding and boundless bliss of the Brahman. It is beyond explanation in terms of the logical intellect. It has no reference to the dialectic opposition between what constitutes *ananda* and the antithesis of *anandamaya*, as a fall from *ananda*. The relevant text starts with *brahmajnaana* and ends with *brahmananda* as the highest end of life. As such it does not postulate the distinction between the knowledge of *Nirguna* Brahman as the intuitional highest, and the attainment of *Saguna* Brahman as the logical highest.

The Brahman is and has bliss. The predication of bliss to the Brahman does not pervert Its nature, but enriches It. The idea of transcendental bliss does not sublimate *Saguna* Brahman, but affirms its know-ability by purified thought. *Sastra* or practical reason does not support the description of Iswara as a self caught up in the contradiction of pleasure and pain.

Sruti would stultify itself if it defined the nature of the Brahman as *saguna* (having attributes), with a view to depriving it of all content by later thought. The *neti* (negative) method applied by the Upanisads denies only the adequacy of employing the categories of logic to establish the reality of the Brahman. Its chief aim is the criticism of the pantheistic view that all is the Brahman and the denial of the finitude of reality, but not of the finite itself.

The Absolute is in the conditioned as *cit* and *acit*, but it is not as the conditioned. It transcends the world of relativity, but does not sublimate it. The Brahman is formless, but not characterless. If the Absolute of metaphysics is not the god of meditation

(*upasana*) and worship but the effectuation of illusion, there may be no need for spirituality, and the striving for liberation. Vedantic freedom is won by spiritual effort by transcending the phenomenal world in its macrocosmic and microcosmic aspects.

The Brahman is transcendental because It is beyond the empirical world, *samsara-mandala*. If *mukti* (liberation) is the sublation of *avidya*, which is really non-existent like the square-circle, it is immaterial whether it is freedom in embodiment here and now, or freedom from embodiment in the world beyond.

The religious consciousness is outraged by the relegation of the *Saguna* Brahman who is at first described as the creator of the cosmic process to the level of *Hiranyagarbha*, the first born of the Brahman, when evaluating *mukti*. If the *Saguna* Brahman is considered less than the Absolute, it suffers from self-deception, as it is the first figment of cosmic nescience. It also suffers from the self-contradiction of the finite-infinite nature, and from the infinite hardships of *samsara* as the aggregate of *jivas*.

For Visistadvaita, the Advaitic view of two Brahman – *Saguna* Brahman and *Nirguna* Brahman - is self-contradictory. This is also refuted by the other Vedantins, notably the *bheda-abheda-vadins*. The latter uphold the monistic view of the Absolute as *sat* or the *Saguna* Brahman. Bhaskara affirms the reality of the Brahman as formless, but not characterless. Yadava and Nimbarka deny Its being attribute-less and formless. Nimbarka's view is that the Brahman is the self-related (*svatantra-sadbhava*) in Its *abheda* aspect, and the distinct and dependent (*paratantra-sadbhava*) in Its *bheda-abheda* aspect. This view of Nimbarka has affinity to Ramanuja's concept of God as *niyantr*, the immanent and eminent cause of the world order.

The philosophical transition from Nimbarka to Ramanuja is the transition from *Bheda-abheda* to Visistadvaita. Visistadvaita

considers that the Brahman is *saguna*, and realizes Himself through His *prakaras* (modes), *acit* and *cit*. The *Saguna* Brahman has infinity of perfections of which some are defining qualities (*svarupa-nirupaka-dharma*) and the others are derivatives of these defining qualities (*nirupita-svarupaka-visesana*). Ramanuja considers that the Brahman has attributes the five essentials of which are *satya*, *jnaana*, *ananta*, *amalata* and *ananda*. The Brahman is a-logical and amoral as It transcends reason.

The Vedantic exposition is often clothed in symbolism, and analogical ideas. Ramanuja uses the analogy of light and luminosity, or the relation between *sarira* and *saririn*. He uses these analogies to bring out the nature of the Brahman and Its relation to the world of *cit* and *acit*. For him, the metaphysical *sat*, which is the One without the second, is the supreme self of all beings, and that the Absolute of philosophy is the God of religion.

Ramanuja's *siddhanta* of the Brahman runs thus. The Brahman is at all times differentiated by the sentient and non-sentient beings that constitute Its body. It can be said to be one only, without a second, previous to creation. At that time, the differentiation of names and forms did not exist. That which makes the difference between plurality and unity is the presence or absence of differentiation through names and forms. The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad also establishes Ramanuja's view thus: 'Now all this was undifferentiated. It became differentiated by name and form'.

Those who hold that the finite self is due to nescience, those who hold it to be due to a real limiting adjunct, and those who hold that the Brahman, whose essential nature is mere being, assumes by Itself the threefold form of enjoying subjects, objects of enjoyment and supreme ruler - all the three categories of them - explain the unity of the Brahman in the *pralaya*, dissolution state only on the basis of absence of differentiation by name and form. But the threefold distinction of subjects, objects of experience and

their ruler persists in the *pralaya* state also by virtue of the potentiality of differentiation.

As to differentiation of the Brahman into the world of name and form, there are different views. One view implies that the Brahman is under the illusive influence of the beginning-less *avidya*. The second implies that the Brahman is Itself in the state of bondage owing to the real and beginning-less limiting adjunct. The third implies that the Brahman assumes different forms, and experiences the unpleasant consequences of *karma*.

But, for Ramanuja, the Brahman has for Its body all sentient and non-sentient beings in the subtle and the gross state. In the effected as well as the causal condition, the Brahman is free of imperfection, and infinity of perfections. All imperfection and suffering, and all change belong not to the Brahman, but only to the sentient and non-sentient beings, which are Its modes. Ramanuja upholds that the universe has its being in God, but is not God. It does not exhaust His infinity.

How the Absolute divides Itself into finite centres may be a riddle or a mystery. That it does so is a fact to the *mumukshu*. Visistadvaita explains it in terms of making the sentient beings into *muktas*.

For Visistadvaita, the Vedantasutras identify the Brahman as the cosmological ground of all existence, *acit* as well as *cit*, with the same Brahman as the spiritual goal of experience. The term 'cause' is not a category of the 'understanding' as it cannot be really applied to transcendental reality. It is a cosmological 'idea' to bring out the self-identity of the Brahman in the *pralaya*, dissolution and the *srsti*, creation stages. The *sat* without a second is the 'unity of composition' in the pre-cosmic stage; and it is the cosmic self as the 'unity of manifestation' in the *srsti* stage. In both the stages, *acit* qualifies and embodies *cit*, and *cit* qualifies

and embodies the Brahman, which is the Self of the self. But in *pralaya*, the manifold of *acit* and *cit* is a real possibility.

Ramanuja accepts the theory of *sat-karya-vada*, and denies *asat-karya-vada*. Creation is not out of 'nothing', but out of something. *Sat* is pre-existent, and not non-existent. The possibility is so subtle that it is practically non-existent. Even in the non-dual experience of sound sleep, nescience coexists with the *saksin* as a real possibility. Possibility is said to be real when it can become actual. The difference between the two is thus only the difference between what is potential and what is actual.

The term 'non-existence' connotes the absence not of non-differentiation, but of cosmic self-differentiation into the world of *nama-rupa*. There is non-division in the sense that there is no distinction of name and form in *pralaya*. In both the states, the Brahman, *cit* and *acit* are distinguishable, but not divisible.

*Srsti* is the self-differentiation of the Absolute into the pluralistic universe of *nama-rupa*. The Brahman with the creative urge wills the many and becomes the manifold. It is the Absolute that externalizes into the endless variations of space-time and embodied beings, by entering into matter with the living self, and energizing it.

The cause and the effect in the Vedantic sense are not different. Their relation is not external or arbitrary. It is internal and organic. Effectuation is not an illusion or self-enveloping process of reality. It reveals the inner purpose of the divine nature, and enriches spiritual life.

The Brahman as the cause is *natura naturans*. The Brahman as the effect is *natura naturata*. The Self is the same in both the states. The world is non-different from the Brahman in so far as it is the effect (*upaadeya*) of the Brahman. The essential nature of

the Brahman is, however, pure and perfect, and is not affected by these changes.

As a philosophy of religion, Visistadvaita is not a mere metaphysical enquiry into the nature of the Brahman as the ground of existence. It is the spiritual method of attaining the Brahman as the supreme end of life. The first four Vedantasutras establish the reality of the Brahman as the ultimate reason of the universe. They connect this knowledge by the method of coordination, *samanvaya* with the supreme value of life, which is the realization of the Brahman. This is the essence of the Upanisads.

The self is subject to *karman*. It undergoes moral expansion and contraction in accordance with the law of retribution. The endless variety of moral experiences accounts for the variations in the birth and status of the migrating *jiva*.

Spiritually, the self is eternal. It is only its *jiva* that is subject to adventure. It has, therefore, history. The self can attain freedom only when it regains its religious consciousness, and realizes its relation as the *prakara* of the Brahman. The process of nature and the progress of the self can thus be understood only in terms of the inner purpose of the Brahman.

The universe is a place for making *muktas*. Matter is moulded for the making of souls. The Brahman is ever pure and perfect. But It realizes Its nature only by entering into matter with the *jiva* for creating the world of *nama-rupa* and *brahmanizing* the self. The natural cause of *parinama*, the moral cause of *karman* and the cosmic cause (*brahmanization*) have their own ultimate explanation in the concept of *acit*, *cit* and the Brahman.

Every school of Vedanta admits the futility of logical and temporal categories to account for the origin of the world. In the phenomenal sense, time has no beginning. When the *sadvidya*

speaks of the world process, it refers only to a particular event in the series of *srsti* and *pralaya*, which is cyclic, and not a sudden creation out of nothing. The beginning-less-ness of the cosmic process is thus a logical mystery.

But the Vedantic schools seek to explain the inexplicable in terms of *maya*, *upadhis*, *parinama-sakti* and *karman*. While some schools such as the *Bheda-abheda*, *Mayavada* attribute the imperfections of life to the Absolute itself, Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, traces the imperfections to the finite self alone. It does realize the sacred mystery and the wonders of nature. The Brahman, according to Visistadvaita, is immanent in the *jiva* as its *antaryamin*. At the same time, It is unaffected by the modifications of the matter and the imperfections of the self.

This view satisfies the metaphysical demand for an all-inclusive unity and the religious quest for the pure and perfected self. It fits in with the theory of *saamaanaadhikaranya* according to which words, having different meanings, may denote only one thing. For example, a term connoting the 'effect' state of the Brahman, including its modal state, connotes also the same Brahman in the causal state. The 'unity of manifestation' is the 'unity of composition' owing to the non-difference of the cause and effect, and the self-identity of the Brahman. Every term or part that refers to the finite being also connotes the Supreme Being or Logos because It enters, along with the individual selves, into the world of matter for the evolution of names and forms.

The term *sarira* denoting the body connotes the *saririn*, the self, ultimately the Brahman Itself. This resolves the problem of the *sadvidya*, namely 'what is that by knowing which everything else is known' satisfactorily. By knowing the cause, the effect is known; by knowing the Brahman, the one without a second, the universe of *cit* and *acit*, which is its effectuation, is also known. This view bridges the gulf between monism and pluralism. There

is no self contradiction or discrepancy as the Brahman is eternally existent as the Self of all beings.

This concept satisfies the quest of the *mumuksu* for eternal life. *Mukti* (deliverance) from *samsara* would be impossible if the Brahman is enveloped by illusion, or conditioned by *upadhis*. Complete freedom would then be impossible as long as there is infinity of *avidya*-ridden or conditioned selves to get *mukti*. No *mumuksu* would seek the Brahman if It is infected by *avidya*, or affected by *upadhi*.

The Brahman is the 'Infinite', not in the sense of quantitative endlessness, or in the sense of the infinite conditioned by the finite and, therefore, finite. The Brahman is the Infinite that dwells in the finite with a view to infinitize the self, and give it the eternal value of deliverance.

The Brahman is the 'Whole' of existence not in the sense of an aggregate or totality, an identity in difference or an all-inclusive unity. It is the immanent self in all beings, and is, therefore, *purna* (infinite) and perfect. The Brahman is the 'Whole' of metaphysics and the 'Holy' of religion.

The Brahman is the first 'Cause' and the final 'Cause' of creation. The potential (enfolded) becomes the actual or the unfolded. This becoming is the inner purpose of soul making. The cause is ultimately identified with the ground. This means that the form and the function of the self are rooted in the Infinite.

The self emerges from the Brahman and merges into It. The seed of the *jiva* is sown in the womb of matter in order that it may have its fruition in *mukti*. The Vedantic aphorism '*kaaranam tu dhyeyah*' elucidates that the Brahman is the all-inclusive Whole, and the ultimate home of eternal values. It is the ground of the universe of *cit* and *acit*, the goal of religious endeavour.

The Brahman is the 'Substance' that exists in Itself and by Itself. The world of *acit* and *cit* is depending on It as Its inseparable attribute. The finite self has substantive being, and lives and moves. It has its being in Vaasudeva, the Self of all beings, the *saririn*. The *jiva* is a ray of the supreme light of the Brahman and is, therefore, Its attribute. But it is also a self sustained by the Brahman and is different from the abstract determining qualities of the Brahman like infinity.

From the denotative point of view, the *jiva* is a unique being. But, from the connotative point of view, it refers to the Brahman as its ultimate meaning. The *visesana* (attribute) is a *prakara* (mode) that is inseparably related as *avinaabhaava* to the *prakaarin* (the inner being). Thus the Brahman imparts substantiality to the self and makes it one with Itself.

The term 'Subject' connotes the Supreme Self, the real subject of all knowledge. Consciousness stultifies itself if there is no self as the subject of predication. The Brahman is the Inner Self of the subjects and objects of experience. The cosmic Self which thinks in all beings is identical with the inmost self of the *jiva*. Realization of this truth ensures spiritual intimacy between God and the soul. The idea of the Brahman as the *sariran* is thus the key to the philosophy of Visistadvaita.

The theory that the Brahman, the Inner Self of the *jiva*, is the same Brahman as the Cosmic Ruler is better appreciated if the unity of the subject and the object is established philosophically.

Visistadvaita provides for religious adoration and mystic intimacy by its idea of the Brahman as the cosmic Ruler who is at the same time the *Paramatman* in the *jivatman*. The Chandogya text 'Thou art That' does not posit the identity of Iswara and *jiva* by removing their self-contradictions. The principle of '*jahat-*

*ajahat-laksanaa*' postulates that the *jiva* and Iswara become identical by the sublation of the self-contradictions of nescience.

Visistadvaita emphasises the truth that Iswara, the cosmic Lord, is the Inner Self of the *jiva*, and guarantees the bliss of spiritual communion between the two. The Infinite that transcends the finite is the same Infinite that is immanent in the finite self. Thus the 'I' of the subject philosophy or the Self that illumines the *jiva* within is the 'Thou' that is the Iswara of the object philosophy. This approach frees the subject philosophy from the charges of subjectivism and atheism, and the object philosophy from the charges of deism and divine determinism. It defines the Brahman as not only What Is, but also What Is Self-revealing.

For Visistadvaita, Iswara, the cosmic Ruler, the omniscient and omnipotent, is greater than the *jiva* with its nescience and impotence. The concept of God or the Brahman varies and develops with the spiritual development of the seeker. When the concept is exalted into an intuition of the Brahman, the seeker apprehends the Brahman as such. The Brahman is the Highest Self or Vaasudeva having the fullness of being and bliss.

Visistadvaita is thus the philosophy of religion that frees philosophy from agnosticism, and religion from dogmatism. It enables the finite self as a seeker after deliverance (*mukti*) to go from *visayajnaana* (sense perception) to *brahmajnaana* (intuition of the Brahman)

## The Brahman as *Adhara*

The philosophic enquiry into the Brahman as the supreme reality is the central theme of Vedanta. The aim of the Visistadvaitin is the clear and distinct knowledge of *Saguna* Brahman with Its defining attributes as enshrined in the Upanisads. Vedantic philosophy is a comprehensive consideration of spiritual experience without sacrificing its integrity, and exhibiting, in a systematic way, its fundamental truths. The truths of Vedanta are self-valid, impersonal and eternal. They can be intuited by consciousness when it is freed from the imperfections of *avidya-karman*. The philosophy of religion makes such intuition intelligible, and evaluates it in the light of *Sruti*.

The philosopher thinks God's thoughts after Him in the light of revelation. These thoughts are mainly metaphysical, moral and aesthetic; and they are the determining qualities of the Brahman. Brahman is knowable by relational thought which is revelatory, and not self-contradictory. There is no self-contradiction or discrepancy in the defining qualities.

Metaphysics, morals and aesthetics are interrelated, and related to the whole. They bring out the nature of the First Cause as well as the Final Cause of all things. The Brahman is the whole of the reality, and the home of all eternal values like truth, goodness and beauty.

Vedanta defines the ontological nature of the Brahman as *satya* (reality), *jnaana* (self-consciousness) and *ananta* (infinity). Its ethical philosophy predicates *amalatva* (goodness) as the moral content of the Brahman as Iswara. Its aesthetics defines the Brahman as *sundara*, the beautiful and *anandamaya*, the blissful.

The Vedantic study of reality, as *tattva*, relates to the nature of the Brahman *per se*, and its modal expressions of *cit* and *acit*. It

is not, however, concerned with the problems of cosmology and psychology. The ontological theory of being or reality is governed by the religious need for realizing it, because it is a philosophy of religion with the objective of knowing the *tattva* with a view to attaining it as *purusartha*, the aim of life.

The metaphysician is also a *mumuksu*, a seeker after salvation, and seeks the revelational truths of the Veda relevant to his spiritual needs, and specializes in the knowledge of the essentials of Vedanta. Vedic knowledge thus deepens into Vedantic wisdom.

The most essential truth of Visistadvaita is the concept of the Brahman as *saririn*, and of *cit* and *acit* as His *sarira* or *sariratma-bhava* (the relationship of body and soul), and its differentiation. It is called *saariraka-sastra*, a keyword of Vedanta. It is as simple as it is comprehensive. It satisfies the tests of logical consistency, the Mimamsa rules or Vedic interpretations, linguistics and the requirements of ethics and aesthetics, as also the needs of religious consciousness.

Ramanuja defines *sarira* as substance which a sentient soul or self can completely support and control for its own purposes, and which stands to the soul in a subordinate relation. The self abides in the Absolute, and lives, moves and has its being in it. The self depends on the Absolute for its form and its functioning, and sub-serves Its end. The Brahman sustains the *jiva* as its Self and inner Ruler, and uses the *jiva* for its satisfaction in the same way in which the *jiva* animates and sustains the body, and uses it for its own satisfaction. This relation is known as that of *aadhaara* and *aadheya* (the sustainer and the sustained), *niyantr* and *niyaamya* (the controller and the controlled), *sesin* and *sesa* (the independent and the dependent). These relations are generally called the metaphysical, moral and aesthetic aspects of reality.

The philosophy of Visistadvaita is a synthetic exposition of these foundational truths. They can be analysed, but not separated.

Every school of Vedanta relates to super-sensuous and supra-rational knowledge as its ultimate truth. In formulating it, it has to rely on analogies drawn from sensuous experience. The concept of *saririn* is an analogical explanation of the vital intimacy between *jivatman* and *Paramatman*. The Brahman, the *saririn*, is metaphysically the ground of existents, morally their inner ruler, and aesthetically the beauty and bliss of life.

The first basic ontological truth of the knowledge of the Brahman as *aadhaara* is the Taittiriya definition that the Brahman is *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta*. The three ontological predicates of *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta* define the Brahman *saguna*. The *advaitin* considers that this definition is negative and cannot, therefore, be a definition. The *laksanika* declares that the definition refers to *Nirguna* Brahman. He argues that, since determination is negation, the *saguna* idea is negated by the *nirguna* truth.

When two cognitions are conflicting and self-discrepant, what is self-explained sublates what can be accounted for in other ways. *Nirguna* is non-dual consciousness which is self-established, and *saguna* is the consciousness of duality and difference, which is relational and, therefore, self-contradictory. *Abheda-jnaana* or the knowledge of non-difference thus sublates *bheda-jnaana* (the knowledge of difference).

The *pramanas* are a process of self-criticism based on the theory of non-contradiction and degrees of truth. *Sruti* is self-valid, and has greater authority than the testimony afforded by sense perception and reasoning. Incidentally, the *nirguna* texts in the *Sruti* which teach non-difference have greater force than the *saguna* texts. They sublimate the *saguna* ideas which teach duality and

distinction. Thus, what comes later in the Vedantic development of truth like *abheda-jnaana* stultifies the earlier and less developed idea. However, the Brahman transcends all degrees and values, and there is nothing that can be subsumed and sublated.

The three determining qualities of the Brahman, namely, *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta*, differentiate the Brahman from *acit* and *cit*. The first excludes the ever-changing world of *prakrti* and the evolving *jiva*. The second excludes the *muktas*, whose *jnaana* was earlier imperfect. The third excludes the eternally free *jivas*, *nitya-muktas*, who have no cosmic control.

The Taittiriya definition of the Brahman as *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta* is negative and is, therefore, no definition at all. The term *satya* denies the temporal and phenomenal nature of the Brahman. It affirms the Absolute as the *sat* without a second. The term *jnaana* refutes the ultimate reality of matter or *acit*. The term *ananta* negates the limitations of space and time. These three terms are not synonymous. They controvert the three different states of empirical and illusive experience of *anrta*, *jada* and *vicchinna*. But, in the light of the linguistic rule of *saamaanaadhikaaranyaa*, they mean only one and the same thing.

The unity of judgment is not a unity underlying difference, or a whole consisting of parts, as unity cannot coexist with difference. The judgment 'the Brahman is *satya*' implies absolute identity. Bare difference is unthinkable and sterile; and identity in difference as the identity of opposites or distinct phenomena is self-contradictory.

Ramanuja rejects the *maya-vaada* view of the Brahman as *nirvishesa-cinmatra*, pure consciousness. He argues that the Brahman is *saguna* and *savisesa* with the ontological predicates of *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta*. The quality of thought and self-luminosity belongs only to thought. There is no self-contradiction

in the subject-object consciousness. The relation between the subject and the object is between distinct phenomena, and not opposites.

Ramanuja gives a new orientation to Vedantic thought by insisting on the coordination of logical, ethical and aesthetic experiences. Several non-contradictory attributes may define the same reality by distinguishing it from other objects. The plurality of these qualities does not mean the plurality of the object defined. Plurality qualifies reality, which is not itself plural. The qualities coexist as distinct phenomena and as the ways of knowing the Brahman.

Ramanuja accepts the logic of the *bheda-abheda* theory regarding the reality of the *Saguna* Brahman, but condemns its ethics which traces the imperfections of life to the *bheda* element in the Brahman. The *Saguna* Brahman has *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, which is eternal and all-pervasive unlike that of the finite-self. It is not featureless.

The idea of the Brahman as the *adhara* of *cit-acit* is the lifeblood of Visistadvaita. It affirms the reality of the separate elements, but denies their separate reality. It offers the mystic assurance that every *jiva* lives, moves and has its being in the All-Self or Vasudeva

## The Brahman as *Satya*

As *satya*, the Brahman is absolutely the unconditioned reality, as distinguished from the conditioned reality of *cit* and *acit*. The *satkarya-vaada* or *parinama-vaada*, the cosmological law of causation, which affirms the non-difference of cause and effect, explains the philosophy of *acit, prakrti*. This theory is opposed to the theories of *asatkarya-vaada, vivat-vaada* and also to the *parinama-vaada* of the Samkhya philosophy. The *asatkarya-vaada* relates the effect as creation out of nothing. *Vivat-vaada* relates creation an illusory appearance. The *parinama-vaada* of the Samkhya refers only to the evolution of *prakrti*, and ignores the progress of *purusa* and the inner purpose of *Purusottama*.

The *satkarya-vaada* affirms that the cause is preexistent, and not non-existent, and that the effect brings out the continuity, and does not betray any self-contradiction. What is non-existent cannot become the existent, and what exists cannot be unreal. A substance enters into different states in succession. What passes away is the substance in its previous state, *avasta* and what comes into being is the same substance in its subsequent state as effect. It is the same object that changes, and the plurality of change is the outcome of the primal unity of the thing. *Parinama* is a perpetual unfolding of what is enfolded. It is the potential or implicit that becomes the actual or explicit.

The one physical substance, clay, enters into many states like pots and pitchers. It is their immanent cause, *upaadaana-karana*. The same *prana* has biological variations of form as well as function. The same mind has varied psychic states. Every being changes from day to day and yet it is the same being. Such continuity, which is physical, biological, psychical and historical, does not show any opposition between one state and another. This development or change brings out the inner value of the thing and does not suffer from self-discrepancy.

*Prakrti* is subject to the law of *parinama* and evolves into the ever-changing phenomenal universe. Matter is not merely what is, but what becomes, and is a series of particular perishing presentations. It is a perpetually fleeting flux. Each object passes over into different states, and each later state has no connection with the earlier one. Events in the temporal order similarly vary and vanish. The body is subject to mobility, metabolism and catabolism. One form of energy is transformed into another, and the psychic process is a stream of momentary modifications. No thought repeats itself exactly in the same way.

Thus, every phenomenon, physical or psychical, is happening by way of cause and effect. It happens and then disappears. Thus, what is considered static is an endless becoming. The becoming moves on without beginning and end, and without intermission. The ever dynamic change implies self-maintenance and stability.

*Prakrti* is not pure passivity or non-being. Its movement is not the outcome of the strife of the opposites of pure being and non-being. *Prakrti* is eternally real. Its primal unity is in constant change and it never stands still. It is perpetually in change.

The *pralaya* state is the reverse order of *srsti* in which each effect is re-absorbed into its immediate cause. *Srsti* and *pralaya* thus succeed each other in endless cyclic order. In the causal state, *sat* is subtle and undifferentiated. But, in the effect state, it evolves itself into the infinite variety of *nama-rupa*.

Both *acit* and *cit*, as the modes of the Brahman, have their being in the Brahman as their ultimate ground. They are sustained by Its inner purpose. The *parinama*, transformation of *pradhana*, *prakrti* is not self-originated, but sub-serves the divine purpose of soul-making. Matter is moulded for the making of the self.

Similarly, the moral law of *karman* is governed by the supreme Divine Will. In *pralaya*, universal dissolution, the *Sat* is alone and one, without a second. It is in the context that *cit* and *acit*, the modes of the Brahman, are in a state of non-differentiation. *Srsti* is the self-determination of the same *Sat* into the universe. The creative act gives content and outward form to the cosmic will. The Brahman with *acit* and *cit* as its modes in the subtle or causal state becomes the Brahman with *acit* and *cit* in the effect state for the reason that cause and effect are non-different in the light of the principle of coordination. *Natura-naturans* becomes *natura-naturata*.

The definition of the Brahman as *satyasya-satyam*, the true of the true, brings to light the full implication of the idea of the Brahman as *satya*. When *acit* is termed *asat* and the self is termed *sat*, the Brahman is termed the true of the true. Reality is not opposed to existence. The distinctions in reality are due to the relative values of the real entities. *Acit* is a fleeting flux passing over into different states with no relation to the preceding one; it is *asat*, non-existent from the pragmatic point of view.

The self is eternal though its self-consciousness undergoes contraction and expansion according to *karman*. Its essential nature does not contract or expand. It is, therefore, called *satya*. It is not affected by the evolutionary process of *prakrti*. In this context, the Brahman is real reality, the true of the true, as It is free of the mutations of matter and the contractions of *karman*. As It is the most real, It is the most spiritual.

The negative definition of the Brahman in the Upanisads in the *neti* method does not deny the Brahman as finite, but denies only the finitude of the Brahman. The Brahman is beyond the perishable and the imperishable. Thus, *cit*, *acit* and Iswara have their own reality and value.

The monist confuses distinct phenomena with opposites. The distinct phenomena may coexist without any contradiction. The different states of the same substance at different times do not betray any self-discrepancy. They are not false, *mithya* or futile, *tuccha*. *Sat* is the unconditioned one without a second, and is the supreme self unaffected by falsity or error, and untainted by falsehood or error.

When the non-differentiated enters into the finite and becomes self-differentiated, it does not expose itself to the perils of the contradiction between being and becoming, or reality and existence. The world is real as it is rooted in the Brahman and is sustained by It as Its eternal self. The supreme end of the self-determination of the Brahman is the moulding of the self. When the empirical self is freed from *avidya* or *karman*, it realizes its non-difference from the Brahman and realizes the being of its being. The manifold distinctions of *jivas* into gods, human beings, animals, insects, etc are traceable to *avidya-karman*.

The Brahman is the *sat* without a second, the self-existent and self-contained substance that is self-caused. At the same time, It is the creative source that differentiates itself into thinking entities and objects of thought. It realizes Itself in Its infinite determinations.

Substance as *sat* is not the negation of determination but is its affirmation and explanation of the diversity of life. The substantive is immanent in its adjectives. 'Whatever is' is the Brahman.

## The Brahman as *Jnaana*

Being and consciousness are not one. The Brahman as *Jnaana* transforms the idea of *sat*, substance with differentiation into the self-conscious subject with self-determination. It has infinite consciousness, unlike the *jnaana* of the *jiva*, and is never limited by *karman*.

One who knows the Brahman becomes the Brahman-like and realizes Its infinite intelligence or consciousness. The Vedantin is not merely interested in apprehending the existence of the Brahman, but also in comprehending Its nature. What he looks for is not knowledge about the Brahman in an external way, but the integral knowledge of the Brahman as the ultimate subject of experience.

The Brahman is self-luminous and does not depend for Its light on any outside object. It is, therefore, defined as *jyotisam jyotih*, the light of lights that illumines the stars above and the self within. By the light of the Brahman the universe is lighted; the sun, the moon or the stars do not shine on their own.

The self is distinct from its consciousness just as light is from its luminosity. The self illumines itself and its objects. It shines by itself as self-consciousness, *pratyak*. But its consciousness is not in itself, but exists for it. That is why it is called *parak*. The Brahman thinks in the self and as the self. It is the eternal of eternals, and also the thinker of thinkers. The Absolute is self-realized and self-subsistent. It is above relations, and yet It includes them.

Consciousness shines forth through its own being to its own substratum at the moment of experience. Pure consciousness without a self is non-existent like the son of a barren woman. It is un-definable.

If a theory is said to be self-proved, it means that it is the proof of some truth to someone. Thought presupposes distinction and difference, and demands their ground, that is, their underlying unity. If there is no diversity, the intellect would rather invent it.

The philosopher of identity insists on the denial of difference and distinction, and also on the affirmation of absolute identity, that is, pure consciousness. This pure consciousness transcends the subject-object relation. But identity is not bare existence. The view of the Brahman as Being, the highest generalization of existence, is the result of regressive abstraction. Existence without content and character is inconceivable and self-contradictory.

Absolute consciousness without the self is equally unthinkable. *Brahma-jnaana*, Self-knowledge is the knowledge of the self as the Absolute. The self is affirmed even in denying it. If consciousness is considered identical to the self when *jnaana* sublates *ajnaana* and thereby itself, it follows that the self cannot sublimate itself. This dialectic destroys the self and, in the process, consciousness. It, therefore, leads to skepticism.

Self-hood presupposes and precedes self-consciousness. The Absolute is not 'a self-absorbing sponge which sucks in its own self-hood', and destroys it. The Absolute is self-conscious Being that is beyond the rational thought, and knows that It is so.

The Brahman is eternally self-realized, is above relations and yet includes them as their pervading identity or self. Identity means different things. It may be bare identity lapsing into nothingness. Or, it may be the systematic unity of selves or elements based on identity in difference of the *bheda-abheda* theory, which is self-contradictory. Or, it may be numerical identity, which is a mechanical whole of thoughts or qualitative sameness, which is

only partial identity. Or, it may be personal identity based on recognition.

The Visistadvaita view of the Brahman as the Self is contradistinguished from all the above views. If self-consciousness is an inner defect of thought which veils reality, it can never reveal it. If the self is destroyed in the process of discovering itself, there is no desire for deliverance (*mumukshatva*), or deliverance (*moksa*) at all. There is no way from the philosophy of nescience to that of identity-consciousness. The view that thought collides with reality offers no scope for escape from its self-contradictions; and there is no spiritual hope of freedom from its imperfections.

Identity in difference is an original confusion infecting systematic unity, and there is no way of ending it. Re-blending the material cannot help to transcend discord and division. The theory of numerical identity that the Brahman is the whole of *cit*, *acit* and Iswara is equally inadmissible as no *mumukshu* is known to adore a whole consisting of many parts. Mere togetherness, as in the case of a multi-coloured cloth, is only an external relation. This does not bring out the real conjunction or identity, which is the inner ground of content.

Personal identity is, no doubt, a fact of recognition, as it recognizes self-sameness and continuity. But the self is not a construction or a creature. It is eternal and self-realized, and its existence does not require mere psychological proof.

The idea of the Brahman as the ever-effulgent Self is free from the defects inherent in other theories. The Self cannot exist without content or character. As the Absolute, It is above relational thought. At the same time, It is the ground of thought. The Brahman is conscious (*cit*) and has consciousness (*caitanya*). The two attributes can be philosophically analyzed, but cannot be really

separated. The Self without self-consciousness is as inconceivable as self-consciousness without the self.

The self, according to Visistadvaita, has *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, attributive consciousness as its *sine qua non*. It is elaborated thus: 'Consciousness is either proved or not proved. If it is proved, it follows that it possesses attributes; if it is not, it is something absolutely nugatory, like a sky-flower'.

Consciousness is the attribute of a permanent conscious self. In the judgment 'I know', the thinker is different from the thought. Yet the thinker, the *dharmin* and the thought, the *dharma* are inseparable like light and its luminosity. Where the self is, there its consciousness is, and there is agreement in presence. Where the self is not, there its consciousness is not, and there is agreement in absence. But the negative test is not applicable, as the absence is not real. The self is the whole; and is the whole only in the self in the sense that it is self-complete, and *jnaana* is its self-explanation.

*Jnaana* cannot exist without the self as its ground, and the self cannot exist without the *jnaana* to reveal it. The Brahman is self-realized, and *jnaana* is revelatory. This attribute of *jnaana* enriches the self, and does not impoverish it. The finite self, like the Brahman, has self-consciousness. But, *karman* contracts the finite self. It, therefore, becomes mutable and imperfect in the empirical state of *samsara*, though it is really self-effulgent. *Jnaana* is what differentiates the self. It has, however, infinite self-expressions in the divine nature, but with modifications in the finite self. In either case, knowledge is of reality, and not reality itself.

Dialectical monism is pregnant with self-contradictions concerning the Brahman and Its nature. According to monism, thought in all its levels is self-discrepant and cannot know reality. The moment the Brahman, the Pure Being thinks and wills to be

the many, negation enters, and monism is caught up in the self-contradiction of the subject-object relation. For example, the knower cannot be known as it transcends thought. But, when it becomes the known, it is infected by *maya* or *avidya*, and is the non-self or the object.

Whether Iswara is the illusory highest, the first figment of cosmic nescience, or the conceptual highest made in the moulds of logic, or the aggregate of *avidya-jivas*, He is 'subject-object, one-many, being-becoming or the light affirmed in and through darkness'. His omniscience is nescience on cosmic scale. When once Iswara lapses from the Absolute and is objectified by illusion, He falls by degrees from the summit of Being, loses His Iswarattva and becomes *eka-jiva*, the finite self. At first, Iswara exists conjoined with *maya*, then becomes its creation and reflection, then an aggregate of individuated phantoms, and finally becomes the *avidya*-ridden *jiva* itself. As Being-non-being, Iswara is Absolute-relative and mediates between the Brahman and the non-self, and is finally rejected as of no consequence.

Vedanta is not dialectic, but a *darsana* (perception) on the path of self-realization. The Absolute is the self of all beings, cit as well as acit, as It is the highest and the most real. It is not riddled with the self-contradictions of the subject-object relation. The knowing self is different from the known object. It is not opposed, confronted or externalized by it. The subject is never objectified by the negative element of *avidya*, and robbed of its reality.

If the logic of *adhyasa*, false appearance is accepted, *ajnaana* infects *jnaana*; the *jiva* is a figment; *mumuksatva* is mockery; and *mukti* is make-believe. There is no transition from the unreal to the real. What is called the non-self, *anatman* is not self-opposition, but is a positive entity.

When a *mukta* realizes the Brahman, communicates his *jnaana* to another *atman*, and is aware of the world of space-time, he does not, by the fact of that knowledge, become *anatman* or *jada*. Non-self is not negative, but has positive sense. The physical object is out there, and it exists for the evolving self. It is the object in relation to the subject that experiences it, without the opposition of the self or the non-self. Inter-subject interaction becomes impossible if the other selves are considered *anatman* on the ground that what is known is *jada*.

If the self is defined as personality, the Brahman is more than personal, as It is free from the limitations of *prakrti* and *karman*, but is not impersonal. If Advaita identifies the Brahman with *sat*, and not *satta*, bare being, then it defines the Brahman as an entity. In this event, it is not very different from Visistadvaita.

The term *atman* has a specific spiritual meaning beyond the concepts of spirit, self or soul. When the term *atman* refers to a finite self, it connotes the eternal, essential self, intuited in *atmajnaana* and different from the empirical temporal self of *ahamkara*. The theory of *nana-jiva-vada*, 'many selves' of Advaita affirms the reality of the inter-subject interaction. The transmission of *brahmajnaana* by a guru to a disciple is one such interaction. Otherness is not hostile to the self. The *atman* is distinguishable not from the Brahman, but within the Brahman, and it is not shut in by any externality or exclusiveness.

The true meaning of the Brahman as *Paramatman* can be understood in the light of *Sruti* (revelation), *yukti* (reasoning) and *anubhava* (experience). The *Paramatman* is the All-Self, Vaasudeva that pervades all beings as their inner self or reason. The intuition carried from the *Sastras* that He is the universe does not equate the two as a pantheistic identity of the pervading self and the pervading object. The Brahman is in the world, but not the world.

To the *brahmajnaanin*, the Brahman alone is real; and the world viewed apart from the Brahman is unreal and worthless. The Absolute exists in the finite centres of experience as their ground and ultimate meaning. The Brahman is not the substrate of nescience. It is the ultimate subject of experience.

To the spiritual philosopher interested in *atmajnaana* or *kaivalya*, the *atman* is also a self different from *prakrti*, and persists in all states of consciousness including *mukti*. Even in deep sleep, it shines in its own light as *saksin*, seer with its *jnaana* only, but without objective consciousness. The *aham* (ego) consciousness is different from *ahamkara*, the bodily feeling arising from *avidya-karman* that accounts for the cycle of life and death. In *visaya-jnaana*, the attributive consciousness contacts the external object, and it results in the awareness of the external object.

*Jnaana* is thus substantive and adjectival, whether it is *brahmajnaana* (God-consciousness), *atmajnaana* (self-consciousness) or *visayajnaana* (world-consciousness). This knowledge, in fact, enhances the value of Vedantic life. If reality is *brahmamaaya*, everything is jugglery or make-believe. If reality is *brahmamaya*, everything is pervaded by the Brahman as its inner self, and throbs with its life and light. The Brahman is a thinker that thinks in the self and as the self, with a view to imparting *brahmabhaava* to it, and perfects it.

The theory of Visistadvaita related to *brahmajnaana* is neither realistic nor unrealistic. It is rather the criticism of both the theories. The realist, who insists on the primacy of matter, and traces consciousness and self-consciousness to *mula-prakrti*, becomes materialist. Idealism is at the pole opposite to realism, as it explains the external world as the mental construction. All schools of idealism such as subjective idealism, mentalism, objective idealism, absolutism are only variations of subjectivism. If the object-philosophy makes *prakrti*, nature the whole of reality

and leads to pan-materialism, the subject-philosophy makes the 'I' the sole reality and leads to super-solipsism.

Visistadvaita reconciles these extremes by recognizing the equal reality of *prakrti* and *purusa* as the expressions of the All-Self. It evaluates them in the light of religious consciousness. Matter exists for the evolving self, and the self has its being in the Brahman, and has supreme value. Subject and object are externally related, but they are not external to the Brahman which is their indwelling self. There is a difference in 'denotation' and 'identity in connotation'. All thinking beings and the objects of thought connote the Brahman as their ultimate meaning and truth.

In other words, *cit*, *acit* and the Brahman denote different entities. But in essence, *cit* and *acit* connote the Brahman only, as It is their self. The omniscience of the Brahman as a metaphysical predicate connotes the eternally all-pervasive character of Its *jnaana* in the universal as well as the particular aspect.

## The Brahman as *Ananta*

Human knowledge is finite and fragmentary. It offers no analogy to the all-knowing character of the Brahman. But when the discursive intellect is perfected, it expands into the intuitive knowledge of Reality. The self, freed from the contraction of *karman*, has cosmic consciousness and sees everything with the eye of the Brahman.

The Brahman has the character of infinity, *anantatva* as a determinate quality, which distinguishes it from *prakrti* and the finite self. The Brahman is free from all the limitations of space, time and causality. Infinity belongs to the essential nature of the Brahman, its *svarupa*, its *jnaana* (perfection) and its spiritual form. The Upanisads define It as higher than the high, and as indestructible.

The Brahman is also different from the *Hiranyagarbha*, *Samasti-purusa*, the aggregate of finite souls known as *jivagana*. The Brahman is free from all imperfections, which are attributable only to the empirical self. It is formless, as embodied-ness arises from subjection to *karman*. Though It abides in all beings, it is not soiled or sullied by their changes and imperfections. The Visistadvaita concludes that there is no being higher than the Brahman, and it is the Supreme Self that is the goal of experience.

The term 'infinite' has different meanings in philosophy. There is considerable ambiguity and misconception attached to it. If it is the 'not-finite', it is non-existent. If it is what is not finite, it is bounded by the finite, and, therefore, finite. If the 'infinite' implies endless series without a last term like infinite space, time or number, it is indefinite, and has no meaning. In such an event, it is empty generalization, devoid of any content.

We appreciate the term 'infinite' better when we consider that the term 'finite' is itself, and not the opposite of 'infinite'. The finite excludes the other, and is yet invaded by it. It exists through its other. But the opposites are absorbed by the inner dialectic of thought in a higher unity. It is then the identity of opposites. The Absolute, as the Infinite, is self-complete and all inclusive. It transcends the contradictions of relational experience by the re-blending of material.

There is another view of the 'infinite'. As the relational thought with its categories is deceptive and illusory, the 'infinite' stultifies thought that is dual consciousness, and remains identical with itself as pure-consciousness without any content. According to this view, every category is infected by *avidya*, and is *abhasa*, illusory. *Cinmatra*, pure thought, without the opposition of self and non-self, alone is real. The *neti* method is supposed to deny dual consciousness. When the 'false' is denied, the 'true' remains as a self-identity.

The term 'infinite' in the philosophy of religion corrects the tendency of thought to abstract itself from the thinking process. It gives a positive meaning to the 'infinite' as actual and determinate. This meaning is defined by the idea of 'inner plan and purpose' for which it is employed.

The 'infinite' may be perceptual, conceptual or intuitional. The infinite of space-time is called the quantitative infinite. In the negative sense, it is without end, and indefinite. The endlessness of an infinite series is a mathematical abstraction. Philosophically, it is worthless. As the 'infinite' is defined as the unconditioned, the quantitative infinite is condemned as a contradiction in terms.

But the infinity of space-time has a positive meaning. As mere parts of a series, they may exist externally in conjunction. But, as parts of a whole, they reveal a plan and a purpose. The

particulars in some sense-perception may be disconnected, and cause an endless fission. This is due to the sundering of reality into abstract units, and the ignoring of their inner unity. What are called infinitesimally small or infinitely big are still concepts referring to space, time or number.

Space is a totality and is real. Time is a real process and is not an appearance. The infinity of space-time is an ordered and orderly plan of creation, and it has its own value in the religious consciousness. The immensity of the cosmos overwhelms scientific imagination. It inspires humility and reverence. The cosmic consciousness of Arjuna brings out the spiritual significance of the infinity of space-time as a partial expression of the wonderful *maya* of Iswara.

The 'infinite' of the mathematician and the philosopher is a concept and is, therefore, determinate and not endless. The endlessness of an infinite series is the result of abstraction. Infinite number is yet number, and its succession is governed by that central idea. There thought may refer to endless ideal possibilities. But the true infinite excludes their possibility; and the possible is the real positive concept. The barely possible may be logically valid. But, in reality, it may be void. When it is said that the finite world is a self-limitation of the Infinite, it means that the Infinite excludes mere possibilities as abstractions. Thought is not thought till its possibility is realized as an inner purpose.

The 'infinite' as *ananta* is ultimately the quality of the Absolute as a single experience. It excludes bare possibility, and is determinate. Experience presupposes the experiencing self. The self remains the self even in transcending its selfhood. It is beyond distinction. Even if the Absolute absorbs the many, It should be aware of this absorption. It is to have the quality of transcending manifoldness.

The Brahman is *ananta*, the eternal of eternals. The Infinite is the unconditioned and perfect. While the Brahman is in the finite, it transcends the limitation of the finite. The Brahman encompasses the finite to infinitize its content and thereby imparts eternal value to it.

When one reflects that one knows that one knows and so on, the process is not liable to the fallacy of endlessness. This is for the reason that knowledge presupposes the self having that knowledge. There can never be a thought without a thinker thinking it. Thought reveals reality and has no lying nature. It can find itself only in the self which it reveals.

The Absolute is unconditioned and perfect, and is the supreme self or the 'individual of individuals'. It is beyond *prakrti*, the fleeting flux of time and the endless chain of causation. The Brahman is in the phenomenal world of space-time, but exceeds their content. The empirical self, subject to the series of births, does not have the perception of the transcending Self, which is higher than the highest.

The true meaning of the Infinite is the eternally unconditioned and perfect Brahman, which is beyond the phenomenal changes of *prakrti*, the imperfections of the empirical self and the finite nature of the freed self.

Reality as the Brahman has the quality of truth, which is the True of the true, the Self-consciousness which is ever self-effulgent as the Light of lights, and of infinity as the Creator of creators and the Eternal of eternals.

According to Ramanuja, the Infinite shines by Itself with Its infinite radiations, and these radiations enhance the glory of the self-effulgent Absolute. The *Saguna* Brahman has infinity of perfections of which some are defining qualities (*svarupa-*

*nirupaka-dharma*) and the others are derivatives of these defining qualities (*nirupita-svarupaka-visesana*). Thus, Ramanuja considers that the Brahman has attributes the five essentials of which are *satya, jnaana, ananta, amalata* and *ananda*.

## The Brahman as *Bhuvanasundara*

The aesthetic experience of beauty is immediate, and not mediate. It is more a possession than a problem. Though beauty is a-logical, it can be analyzed and rendered articulate. Beauty is more attractive than truth and goodness.

Visistadvaita is the only philosophy that recognizes the eternal value of beauty as an essential factor in the divine plane of soul-making. While the Vedantasutras systematize the truths of Vedanta and the Gita formulates its ethics, the Bhagavata intuitively the nature of the Brahman as Bhuvanasundara, the beauty of the world that is expressed in nature and is not exhausted by it. The cosmos is concord, and not discord. It is the creative expression of the divine *lila*, sport of love. The Lord vivifies the *jiva* by sowing the seed of His primal beauty into its inner being. The beauty of nature and the fair forms of human and celestial beings are but partial revelations of the unsurpassed beauty of the Brahman.

Reality is essentially beautiful. But the world-ling, steeped in sensuality, renders it ugly. When, however, the world-ling turns into a mystic, his vision is transformed, and he communes with Beauty. In the ecstasy of that communion, he loses himself. The aesthetics of Visistadvaita is a systematic exposition of the nature of the Brahman as Bhuvanasundara. It satisfies the triple ideals of value philosophy commonly known as truth, goodness and beauty.

Beauty is not the quality of a thing that causes pleasure to the subject, nor is it a subjective creation. It is an immediate spiritual experience exalted by disinterested imagination. It is, therefore, the object of universal appreciation and satisfaction. As an intuitional expression, beauty has more aesthetic value.

Aesthetics, as an organ of philosophy, defines beauty as an essential quality of Reality, which is transfigured into a mystic

vision. This way, the aesthetics of beauty is reinterpreted as a philosophy, first by a process of creative criticism, and then as a mystic view. Art criticism may be made in a realistic and idealistic way. While the realist relies on the representation of external beauty, the idealist defines beauty as a mental construction and an inner contemplation, and makes art subjective.

Visistadvaita corrects these impressions by explaining beauty as both immanent in nature and transcendent. Beauty is also evaluated from the standpoints of classicism and romanticism. The former type follows the *a priori* way, accepts absolute standards and breeds the attitude of loyalty, and reverence to tradition. But the latter type revolts against dogmatism and scholasticism. It delights in self-creative freedom and spontaneity. Its motto is not acceptance, but adventure. It is expression for its own sake.

But Visistadvaita avoids scholasticism and sentimentalism in regard to *rasa* and *dhvani*. It insists on the intuition of the beautiful as the fulfillment of a disciplined mind freed from sensual ugliness. Aesthetics, as art criticism, applies the criteria of immanence and transcendence. It elevates the science and art of aesthetics into a philosophy as the critique of the creative impulse. It is the intuitive expression of infinite beauty through the medium of the finite. It portrays the beauties of nature and the embodied self as partial revelations of the absolute beauty of God as *param-jyotis*, the Supreme Shining-Self, *Bhuvanasundara*, without any shade of ugliness.

Aesthetics, like ethics and epistemology, is ultimately rooted in metaphysics. Reality is essentially beautiful. It is ugliness that is a problem and not beauty. The proneness to see the world ugly is traceable to the creative freedom of the finite self, and not to the Infinite. Aesthetic philosophy affirms the intrinsic nature and eternal value of the beautiful as an essential quality of Reality

and not as an illusory appearance. It presupposes the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly.

To say that the distinction is due to *avidya* which is sublated by *jnaana* is to deny the value of aesthetics itself. The pluralistic view that there are atomic bits of beauty, which cannot be unified and harmonized, is not true. So is the view that beauty and ugliness are relative and discrepant, and that they should be absorbed or annulled. Ugliness is an empirical experience, but, in the transcendental state, it ought not to be.

Beauty is formless, and yet has a form of its own. The form of beauty varies with its matter and determines its own value. The soul of beauty vanishes if it is not embodied in its spiritualized medium. Beauty is in the look and feel of the medium. The beauties of nature are less attractive than the fair forms of birds and animals. The human form is the ultimate triumph of beauty. But absolute beauty has transcendent charm and eternal value.

Visistadvaita recognizes the relativity of form and matter, and constructs a ladder of beauty from earth to heaven. Its view of absolute beauty is finally transfigured into an enchanting vision of the Divine. Ugliness is the result of the finite self being soiled by sensuality. But when the self is released from its dross, it realizes itself as the embodiment of divine beauty.

The aesthetic philosophy of Visistadvaita transforms the Brahman of metaphysics and the Isvara of ethics into the *Bhuvanasundara* of the Bhagavata. The Absolute of metaphysics becomes the beautiful God of aesthetic religion. The self-resplendent and unsurpassable beauty of the Brahman is embodied in the universe, but exceeds its finiteness and imperfections. The Brahman is without limbs (parts), *niravayava*. In the ontological sense, the Brahman transcends the psycho-physical changes of *prakrti*, and is *nirguna*. In the ethical sense, the Brahman is free

from the imperfections of the *karma*-ridden self and has infinite perfection. As the ultimate Truth, the Brahman is infinite and beyond all conceptual categories. At the same time, He has infinity of perfections.

But to the *mumuksu*, who seeks the intimacy of communion, the ontological Beyond and the ethically Perfect, has no value or attraction. It is aesthetics that mediates between metaphysics and ethics, and brings down heaven to earth, and elevates earth to heaven. Aesthetics is midway between sensuousness and spirituality, and bridges the gulf between the finite and the infinite.

The triple idea of the Brahman as possessing *svarupa*, *rupa* and *guna* expresses this truth beautifully. His *svarupa* as *sat* without a second creates a feeling of remoteness. His *gunas* arouse the feeling of reverence. But his *rupa* as *Bhuvanasundara* acts as an aesthetic copula between His *svarupa* and His *gunas*. It brings to light the attributes of intimacy and attractiveness, which are very vital to the mystic consciousness. The Brahman that transcends the world of *cit* and *acit* enters into the *atman* with a view to deify it. To satisfy the *mumuksu*, who is a mystic, the Brahman individualizes a super-sensuous form of His own with bewitching beauty designed to remove the fleshly feeling of the *jiva*.

The Brilliant-Self, *Param-jyotis* that illumines the sun and the stellar worlds is the inner beauty that illumines individuality. He who dwells in the sun, the moon and the stars, whom the sun, the moon and the stars do not know, but whose body they are, is the inner Ruler Immortal. The golden Person within the solar orb is the Person that shines in the *atman* with a divine form of infinite beauty. This beautiful form of the Brahman is the incarnation of the super-sensuous Beauty that allures the self and ravishes it out of the fleshly feeling. The mundane beauty of Manmadha or Eros that soils the *jiva* is conquered by the supra-mundane beauty of *Bhuvanasundara*. He is, therefore, called *madana-mohana*, and

not *madana-dahana*, who transforms and transcends Eros but does not destroy him. The cosmos, a concord, is a living expression of the beauty of the Brahman.

The idea of an extra-cosmic Deity with an increasing cosmic purpose militates against the ideas of omniscience and perfection. The theory of *lila* remedies this defect by insisting on the primacy of aesthetic consciousness and regarding the cosmic process as spontaneous creative expression of the Brahman as the divine artiste. The Brahman is pure and perfect, and His will is externally self-realized. But His omnipotence and perfection cannot be reconciled with the reality of evil and the fact of unmerited suffering. What we live in is the most irrational and the worst of all possible worlds, and no merciful divinity would make a world so full of evil and suffering. This is a dichotomy which needs rational explanation.

Aesthetic philosophy, which encompasses metaphysics and ethics, elevates the problem to the level of mystic intuition and gives a new meaning to existence and experience. While thought dissects life and creates ultimate doubts, moral earnestness breeds a sense of responsibility and sinfulness. The aesthetic consciousness disciplined by logic and freed from the ugly effect of *karman* sees everything with the eye of the Brahman. Creation is then intuited as a sport of divine artiste and is regarded as His *lila*. *Srsti*, creation is the creative joy of self-expression and self-division, and the evolution of *nama-rupa* is the evolution of infinite forms of beauty from the infinite Beauty whose form is formless. The world of space-time is the eternal interplay between the static and the dynamic aspects of beauty.

The creative activity of God in the world of space and time is symphony without any jarring note. Each self is like a note on the musical scale, and marks a rhythm in the dance of divine beauty. The world is a song of beauty. Its sonorousness is imparted to

every part of it and makes it vibrate with its music. The divine Artiste pours beauty into nature with a view to removing the fleshly feeling and other blemishes of the finite self, beautifying it and playing the game of love with it.

The beauty of the Brahman is self-resplendent. It radiates its entrancing joy to the world by beautifying the self. In mystic literature, this art is known as the process of spiritual alchemy. The divine Artiste assumes five enchanting forms of beauty to beautify the ugly self sullied by the lust of the flesh. These forms are *para*, the transcendental; *vyuha*, the infinite; *antaryamin*, the immanent; *avatara*, the incarnation; and *arca*, the permanent.

The Upanisads glorify the transcendental beauty of the Brahman as *jyotisa*-*jyotis* where the sun does not shine, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor lightning. The Vedantasutras identify the Light which shines above this heaven, higher than everything else in the highest world, beyond which there are no higher worlds, with the highest Person of infinite splendour in the supreme world of eternal glory, *nityavibhuti*, of which this phenomenal world is only a partial expression owing to His *yogamaya*. In that yonder world of Beauty, nature shines forever as *suddhasatva*, as spaceless space, without the passing shadows of *parinama*, bodying forth the ideas of absolute beauty.

Brahmopanisad, *Pancaratra*, exalts the *vyuha* form of beauty and the Puranas glorify the sleeping beauty that reposes on the milky ocean of infinity. They portray the creation of the cosmos as the awakening to life of the archetypal forms of beauty. The divine Artiste is an alchemist who makes a beautiful soul by removing its dross of sensuality, *kama* and plays with it the game of love.

The *antaryamin*, the Beauty that indwells every *jiva* as its enchanter, makes it pulsate with creative life and participate in its

inner joy. The body is not composed of dust or conceived in sin, but *brahmapuri*, the abode of the Brahman, and is a living temple of divine beauty. The *devas* delight in dwelling in the human body, and *Deva-deva*, the God of all gods, as *Bhuvanasundara*, abides in Its *daharakasa* with a view to vivifying the moral self and making it immortal.

The Ramayana and the Bhagavata have specialized in the philosophy of the beautiful and have glorified the *avatars* as incarnation of the super-sensuous and supra-personal beauty of the Brahman in sensuous forms. The *avatara-rahasya*, the most sacred truth, sums up the wisdom of Vedanta, which cannot be described in words or defined by thought. The incarnation is not an illusory appearance of the Absolute (*indrajala*). Nor is it the embodied self with psychophysically organized mind-body conditioned by *karman*, and subject to birth and death. The beauteous form of the *avatara* is *apraharta*, not made of perishing *prakrti* nor the product of *karman*, but is self-determined and self-evolved.

Even the view of the ethical religion that the *avatara* is the descent of Isvara into the empirical life of the *jiva* and the history of humanity, in moments of cosmic moral crisis, with a view to punish the wicked, by taking away their tools of wickedness and reestablish the law of righteousness is not adequate.

The *avatara* satisfies the mystic yearning of the *jnanin*, who hungers for God and pines for the soul-sight of His enchanting beauty. The Ravisher of souls, He cannot bear separation from His 'other'. *avatara* is elusive, but not illusory. It has a seductive and irresistible charm. The beauty of Sri Rama was so entrancing that the *rishis* and *yogins* of the forest of Dandaka, rapt in *samadhi*, were spellbound and became the *gopis* of Brindavan to relish its immortal bliss.

The Bhagavata is a composition *par excellence* of the dalliance of divine Beauty with the beloved beings of the enchanted land of Brindavan. The transcendent Beauty that is infinite and eternal incarnates, according to a divinely ordained plan, on the metamorphosed beauty spot Brindavan, with a world-bewitching form to play the *lila* of love. The metaphysical concept of *maya* is now changed into the aesthetic idea of the *Mayin*, the divine Artiste. All nature wears a festive garb. The shining gods abandon their celestial homes and the rishis renounce their meditation, drawn by the strange spell of beauty. The Holy of holies, absolutely free from evil (*yogesvaresvara*), transforms Himself into the Ravisher of souls, *Manmatha-manmatha*. It is only the pure in heart, free from the lust of the flesh, that can revel in the bliss of *Krisna-lila*. The righteousness of Sri Rama is consummated in the rapture of *Krishna-lila*, and the Lord of beauty is *jara-cora-sikhamani*, who steals away the hearts of all, and ravishes them out of their fleshly feeling.

The other abode of Beauty is the permanent incarnation of *arca* in which the transcendental Beauty, beyond the phenomenal world, enters into the chosen forms of *prakrti* as *vigraha*. *Arca* is not the idealized projection of creative imagination touched by religious feeling. Nor is it the symbolic expression of the Infinite in the finite. It is the incarnation of divine Beauty itself, and the embodiment of His accessibility even in the world of sense-perception. Infinite Beauty enters into finite forms without losing His infinity and Isvaratva, to commune with the devotee to infinitise his aesthetic consciousness.

Thus, the sleeping Beauty of *ksirabdhi*, the Ocean Pacific, reposing on infinity, becomes the speaking Beauty in the stone. Only those who have eyes can see the enchanting form, and only those who have ears can hear the divine song. The Alvars with a genius for intuiting the *arca* had a soul-sight of Beauty. Their

inspiring utterances are an invitation to humanity to share in the mystic rapture of such aesthetic communion.

The philosophy of art in Visistadvaita is ultimately founded on the idea that the beauty of the Brahman leads to eternal bliss. The exposition of this truth brings out the vital relation between aesthetics, *Alamkara-sastra* and Vedanta. In the synthetic philosophy of Visistadvaita, science and art are exhibited as a way of approach to *brahma-jnaana* and *brahmananda*. *Alamkara-sastra*, as aesthetic science, has its ultimate meaning in the artistic philosophy of the Brahman as the Beautiful and the Blissful.

Every aesthetic experience has its emotional content, though every emotion is not aesthetic. The theory of is a basic concept in Hindu art. Every being or *jiva* is attracted by beauty. But man alone knows that he has such responsiveness, and constructs an aesthetic philosophy. When the philosopher is moved by beauty, he becomes an artiste and poet.

Beauty is an expression of intuition. Without a medium or sensuous content, it loses its soul. On the other hand, literature as poetry or *kavya* is word-magic, having a moving appeal and leading to immediate enjoyment. *Rasa*, spiritual exaltation is the very soul of poetry (*vakyam rasatmakam*) and is experienced by responsive minds, as aesthetic joy accompanies the contemplation of a *bhava*. *Rasa* is the feel of a ruling aesthetic mood. It is not, like taste, a physical joy, but is an inner spiritual enjoyment. It is an intuition with its own artistic expression. Each *rasa* is a specific feeling tone having its own aesthetic necessity and value; it is not a response to an alien situation.

Being self-creative, a *bhava* involves the more of itself and its joy is fecundated. The immortal beauty of Ramayana is intuited and cannot be linguistically explained on account of its infinite

suggestiveness, sweetness and inner grace. These qualities have an eternal appeal to the heart of humanity.

The aesthetic moods are classified, according to their feeling tone, into nine types. They are *bhibhasta*, disgust; *bhayanaka*, fear; *vira*, heroism; *adbhuta*, the marvelous; *raudra*, the angry; *hasya*, the humorous; *karuna*, the pathetic; *santa*, the peaceful; and *sringara*, love. *Sringara-rasa* is the queen of the *rasas*, and has supreme value in aesthetic religion.

Aesthetic religion utilizes the emotions of fear, anger, wonder and sex. By sublimating and spiritualizing them, it removes their sensual content and directs them God-ward. This view makes feeling furnish the dynamic element of the religious motive. Aesthetic religion is founded on normal psychology. It recognizes the truth that the instincts can only be spiritualized and not destroyed.

The Bhagavata, in its own inimitable way, declares that those who, with devotion, direct their *kama*, sexual passion; *krodha*, anger; *bhaya*, fear; *sneha*, friendship; *aikya*, comradeship; *bhakti*, love ceaselessly to Hari, become one with Him and attain His likeness, *tanmayata*. Hari destroys the evil in them and leads them to godliness. In the alchemy of Krsna love, the blemish of the *jiva* is removed, and the *jiva* is *brahmanized*.

When the *bhavas* are spiritualized, they become the essential factors of aesthetic religion. The vision of the cosmic form, *Visvarupa* granted to Arjuna by the Lord is an instance of the sentiments of *bhayanaka*, *vira*, *raudra* and *adbhuta*, which are intrinsically spiritual. Arjuna was awestruck by the vision of the formless form of Krsna as Isvara, with its endless stretch of space and sweep of time, appearing as the destroyer of the world.

The infinity and omnipotence of Isvara contrasted with the impotence and the infinitesimal nature of the *jiva* generate the feeling of one's own insignificance, and arouse the sentiment of reverence. Cosmic aesthetic pleasure results from the experience of the incongruities of life, and is opposed to serious-mindedness and light-heartedness alike. In the blending of the joy of the eternal realm and the tragic tension of the realm of *samsara*, there results the aesthetic feeling that the cosmos has a comic touch.

The Ramayana is the epic of the reign of *karuna-rasa* and, with poetic genius, the other *rasas* are harmoniously blended with *karuna* by the author to arouse the mood of pity and develop it to perfection. *Sringara-rasa* is the joy of seeking the beauty of sex and reveling in love as in Saakuntala. It is regarded as the *rasa par excellence*, as it is the consummation of human love. Sex is the master device of nature to draw souls together. The science of eroticism, *kama-sastra* is an aesthetic education, which consists in changing the brute feeling in human love, and bringing about the psychophysical unison of two souls. The joy of *samslesa*, the union of lovers is more than the logical satisfaction of the synthesis of opposites. The paradox of love lies in conquest by submission, and the heightening of love by separation. Mystic idealism utilizes the fidelity and mutual-ness given in *sringara-rasa*, and elevates it to the level of divine love of Radha and Andal. It is not eroticism, but the fulfillment of divine love. The love of Sri Krsna as *Manmatha-manmatha* turns the *visaya-kama* of the earthbound selves into the *bhagavat-kama* of the *bhakta*, and the *sringara-rasa* becomes *brahma-rasa* and *brahmananda*.

The attainment of bliss and the removal of sorrow are the end and the aim of life. But the nature of bliss and the means of securing it can be determined only by Vedantic aesthetics. To the materialistic and egoistic hedonist, the highest good of life is the feeling of pleasure derived by the gratification of the cravings of

the senses. But sense-pleasures are fleeting and defective. As they arise and disappear, they have no stability or inner value.

On the other hand, man finds satisfaction in the life of reason, aesthetic contemplation and altruistic service. The mental happiness so derived is more valuable than the external pleasures derived from the senses. More valuable than mental happiness is the spiritual joy of self-realization, *kaivalya*. The knowledge of *atman* as contrasted with *prakrti* is an inner joy, which is qualitatively different from the hedonistic pleasures. While the pleasures of *prakrti* are fleeting, the joy of self-knowledge is stable, and is an instance of *santi*.

But even this state is not the highest end, as it is egocentric, and may lapse into quietism. The value of *bhagavat-kama* is higher than that of *atma-kama* and *visaya-kama*. By intuiting the beauty of the Brahman, the *atman* is immersed in immortal bliss.

Visistadvaita is the only religion that equates the Absolute with the God of Beauty and Bliss. It may, therefore, be called aesthetic religion. In this regard, it is allied to mysticism, which is the spiritual yearning of the *jiva* for communion with its inner self of Beauty, and absorption in the ecstasy of such communion. The Anandavalli, the Bhumavidya and the Madhavidya portray the beauty of this truth in unsurpassable poetry.

The Taittiriya Upanisad states that all living beings are born in *ananda*, live, move and have their being in *ananda*, and enter into it. It defines the Brahman as *anandamaya*. The *Sruti* employs a calculus of pleasures in an ascending scale of values, and ends with the highest bliss of the Brahman. The Brahman is supreme and not to be surpassed. It cannot be adequately described and defined. The pleasures of the finite self are tinged with pain, and pale into nothingness when compared to *brahmananda*. Though

the Brahman is the inner self of the *jiva*, It is not touched or tainted by the imperfections of the *jiva*. It is absolutely blessed.

The term *anandamaya* does not connote maximum pleasure. It implies the presence of pain. The concepts of quantity and causality of pleasure and pain are applicable to the self of *samsara*, and have no transcendental use. Further, the *mantra* which defines the Brahman as *satya, jnaana* and *ananta* also defines It as abounding bliss. In the light of the rule of coordination, the term *anandamaya* connotes only the Brahman, and not the *jiva*. The Upanisadic dictum 'he who knows the Brahman attains the highest' distinguishes between the self that attains bliss and the Brahman that is attained.

The Brahman, the cosmic self, is also the inner self of the *jiva*, and It finally imparts Its bliss to it and *brahmanizes* it. The enjoyment of *brahma-rasa* by the *jiva*, on its being freed, does not connote the absolute identity of the experiencing subject and the experienced object. The Madhu-vidya of Visistadvaita, a Brahmapanisad, explains the nectar of the sun extracted by the *devas* in a Vedic way as the bliss of the Brahman that is the Light of lights, and the inner self of the sun. The self within the eye is the Brahman, the beautiful and the blissful. The Brahman is called *vamanih*, the bestower of all blessings, and also *bhaminih*, the  *jyotis* or splendour that shines in all the worlds. He is *ka*, pleasure and *kha*, the all-pervading infinite.

In the exposition of the Bhuma-vidya, Ramanuja establishes that the Brahman is *bhuman*, infinite bliss. By intuiting the Brahman, the freed self intuits His *vibhuti* or *aisvarya*, where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else and knows nothing else. There is nothing apart from the Brahman. The mystic, who rejoices in the self, revels in it and sees everything with the eye of the Brahman.

To a patient suffering from excessive bile, drinking water, though pure, is not pleasant. But to a healthy person, it is wholesome and pleasant. Similarly, the *jiva* suffering from *avidya-karman* views the world as distinct from the Brahman, and subjects itself to the ills of *samsara*. But the *mukta*, freed from *avidya-karman*, intuits the same world as *aisvarya*, the gift of the Brahman. The intuition of the Brahman as the All-Self leads to infinite and immortal bliss. Visistadvaita, with its genius for coordination, affirms that the Absolute as the sat without a second is *anandamaya*, without any shadow of imperfection. It is the Highest Self.

The philosophy of aesthetics is as valid as metaphysics and ethical thought, for it is the enquiry into the nature of the Brahman as the beautiful and the blissful. As a speculative philosophy, it synthesizes its formal and material character. The aesthetics of Visistadvaita defines the Brahman as *Bhuvanasundara* and identifies cosmic beauty with the inner beauty of the self. It then expounds the five beautiful forms of the Brahman and the different kinds of *rasas*, giving the highest value to *sringara-rasa* in its spiritualized aspect. Beauty leads to bliss. After controverting the *nirguna* theory, it insists on the aesthetic definition of the Brahman as *Bhuvanasundara* and *Anandamaya*. It emphasises that the absolute of metaphysics is the *anandamaya* of the philosophy of art.

Visistadvaita is thus the only philosophy of religion that recognizes the eternal value of beauty and defines the Brahman as the beautiful and the blissful.

## The Brahman as *Saririn*

The Absolute is not only the Being of being, but is the super-subject that is the *prius* and presupposition of predication, and the ultimate reason of things. It is the universal which, while giving meaning to the universe, exceeds its content. It is the true subject that does not sublimate thought, but is its ultimate source. It is the true infinite different from the mathematical infinite of quantity.

From the cosmological point of view, it enters with the finite self as its *sarira* into nature, evolves names and forms, and thus becomes the cosmic ground. The cause, *upadana* itself becomes the effect, *upadeya*. The infinite is in the finite without losing its infiniteness. In this way, epistemology, ontology and cosmology as branches of metaphysics determine the nature of the Brahman as absolute truth and consciousness, and as the world-ground.

According to Visistadvaita, the Brahman, the subject of Vedantic enquiry, is also the goal of the spiritual quest. Enquiry after, and the apprehension of, the Brahman are followed by the eternal values of the experience of beauty, goodness and truth, and their conservation in the divine content. The philosopher, who thinks after God alone, sums up the ultimate values of life in terms of cognition, conation and feeling. These are not merely subjective experiences, but are objective factors that constitute the determining qualities of the Brahman. They are considered divine qualities revealing the character of God.

The finite is rooted in the Infinite, is sustained and controlled by It, and exists for its satisfaction. The Brahman is the metaphysical ground of the world of *cit* and *acit*, the inner ruler of the finite self and the goal of life. The key thought of Visistadvaita, which reveals this inner relation between the Brahman and the

world of *acit* and *cit*, is known as *sarira-sariri-bhava*. It is regarded as the differentia of the whole system, *pradhana-pratitantra*. Vedanta is, for this reason, known as the *Sariraka-sastra*.

This is the central idea of the philosophy of Ramanuja, and it alone satisfies all the *pramanas*. It solves the riddles of thought, and dispels the ills of life. It is philosophically satisfactory and fulfills the claims of the *samanvaya* method. It is spiritually satisfying as it harmonizes the apparent discords of the scriptural texts.

The supreme test of a philosophy lies in its simplicity and suggestiveness. The idea of the Brahman as *sarva-saririn*, the Self whose body is the universe, eminently conforms to this test.

The concept of the Brahman as the *saririn*, and the world as the *sarira*, is the key note of the ontology of Ramanuja as revealed in *sadvidya*, and developed by *satkaryavada*. The *sadvidya* states that the Brahman is the real Reality by knowing which everything else is known. The Brahman is self-truth. It can be known because It is real. It is not true to say that It is real because It can be known. It is not only self-revelatory, but is also the Inner Self of all beings. It enters into the world of *acit* along with the finite selves, and evolves the names and forms that constitute the world of space-time.

The universe is rooted in the True and rests in the True. Knowledge is not a passage from falsity to reality, but from reality to more and more reality. Because the Brahman is real, the world, which is only its effect and not different from it, is also real. This view is different from pan-illusionism and a-cosmocism which deny the reality of the world order. Visistadvaita affirms that the finite is real because it is rooted in the Infinite, and pulsates with its life. It negates the view of Advaita that the finite is a fictitious

imagining of the Absolute owing to the distorting and pluralizing power of *avidya*.

If the Brahman is mere indeterminate consciousness, *nirvisesa-cinmatra*, and the world is a baseless fabrication of *maya*, then Isvara, the first figment of cosmic nescience or *avidya* is unreal. The *jiva*, the reflection of the Absolute in *avidya*, is unreal. Every social relation is then a magic show. Metaphysics itself is then a mere make-believe.

The only way of avoiding this skepticism and nihilism is the acceptance of the theory of the divine nature of Reality and of the immanence of the Brahman, without the pan-cosmic identification of the cosmos with God. Vaasudeva is the All-Self that pervades the universe as *paramakasa*, without being affected by its imperfections. *Srsti*, creation is a self differentiation of the Absolute in which the possible becomes the actual. The One, without a second, wills to be the many, and differentiates Itself into the pluralistic universe. This self-differentiation is not an act of self-deception or false predication, but the process of self revelation.

The Brahman enters into the world of matter with the *jiva* as its *sarira*, vivifies it and evolves the heterogeneous world of space-time. The Brahman with *cit-acit* as its *sarira* in the undifferentiated, *avibhakta* state becomes the Brahman with *cit-acit* as *sarira* in the effect state of differentiation, *vibhakta*. As the effect is the cause in another form and not different from it, by knowing the Brahman, *natura naturans*, the world order, *natura naturata* is likewise known. The world is false only if it is viewed as separate from the Brahman. The world is as real as the Brahman.

Ramanuja utilizes the principle of *samanadhikaranya* in the exposition of the *sarira-saririn* relation between the world and the Brahman. It carries the idea of one thing being equally qualified

by several attributes each of which has its own distinctive meaning and motive, and embodies the unity of difference. The principle of *samanadhikaranya* is the grammar of Vedantic thought. It enables us to understand the epistemological exposition that the world of matter and souls is the *aprthak-siddha-visesana* of the Brahman.

Every proposition, secular or Vedic, predicates a quality or qualities of a subject in reality and is, therefore, significant. The meaning is gathered by reference to the context, convention and relevance. Every term as such has meaning only when it is functionally related to other terms in a living language, and language is itself a system of meanings due to the operative identity that pervades differences. The ultimate subject of language which ensouls it is the Brahman.

The determining qualities of the Brahman like *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta* bring to light Its infinite perfections. It is not correct to say that such predication is a perversion of reality. If the Brahman were identified with Itself, there would be no point in enquiring into Its nature. Such enquiry would be self-discrepant and suicidal. The cosmological truth is that the Brahman as *upadana-karana* is also the Brahman as *upadeya*. This is in line with the law of coordination. There is no discrepancy between the two states, as there is no discrepancy between the childhood of a person and his youth. The pantheistic affirmation that the world is the Brahman brings out the all pervasive nature of the Brahman as the inner self or *saririn* of all beings. Further, the Vedantic dictum 'Thou art that' refers only to coordination and no contradiction, as it reveals the self-identity of the Brahman existing in the objective and subjective forms. It states the truth that the cosmic self connoted by 'That' is the same as the inner self or *saririn* of the *jiva* connoted by the term 'Thou'. This concept stresses the inner intimacy between the *Paramatman* and the *jivatman*.

The problem of the relation between *guna* and *gunin* is a crucial test for deciding the rival claims of Advaita and Visistadvaita. The Advaitic view of *Nirguna* Brahman as indeterminate consciousness is a philosophy of negation, which seeks to establish the reality of *Saguna* Brahman as religious necessity, with a view to demolishing it dialectically by subsequent *jnaana*. But Visistadvaita affirms everything and denies nothing, owing to its insistence on the self-revelation of the Brahman in the universe as its all-sustaining soul.

Determination is not negation, as negation itself is determination and has positive meaning. The *sat* in *sadvidya* of Visistadvaita is *savisesa* and not *nirvisesa*. This is for the reason that the creation is considered as self-differentiation of the Absolute, which is consistent with the principle of coordination and the requirements of the *pramanas*. What is called *Nirguna* Brahman in philosophic thought is itself *saguna*, as pure consciousness emptied of content is the hypostatization of an abstraction.

‘To be intelligent’ means ‘to have the quality of intelligence’, and there can be no *visesana* without a *visesya*. The judgment ‘the lotus is blue’ refers to the substance, *visista*, namely the lotus, having the quality of blueness and the predication of an ideal content to a subject in reality. Reality or *visista* is the organic unity of the *visesana-visesya* relation, and the two are distinguishable, but not divisible.

The unity of the Brahman and the world as *visesya* and *visesana* is *visista-aikya* and not *svarupa-aikya*. For Visistadvaita, the world is the *visesana* of the Brahman.

In the judgment ‘man is rational’, the quality is the differentia of the subject. When the attribute is distinctive of the subject, it is called its *aprthak-siddha-visesana*. The genus, *jati* is vitally related to the individual, *vyakti*. The quality, *guna* is

embodied in its subject, *gunin*. Terms denoting *jati* and *guna* denote also *vyakti* and *gunin*, according to the rule of coordination.

The constituents of the world are not unrelated or isolated bits, but are interrelated, and related to the whole of Reality. Every judgment, scriptural or secular, is an attribute of the Brahman which is the ultimate Reality. The *jiva* is related to the Brahman as its *aprthak-siddha-visesana* like the light of a luminous body, the fragrance of a flower and the body of the self.

The distinguishing self-consciousness, *dharmabhuta-jnaana* is different from the self, *dharmin* distinguished by it. Yet the two are non-different in the sense that the essential attribute of a subject cannot exist apart from the subject. The non-sentient world is likewise an *amsa*, attribute of the Brahman, for it cannot be apprehended apart from the Brahman. The Brahman is thus *visesya*, and matter and self are *visesana*; and the *visesya* is *nirvikara*, and is not affected by the imperfections of the *visesana*.

The *jiva* is a *prakara* of the Brahman and is, therefore, called the *prakarin*. One thing is called the *prakara* of another if it cannot subsist by itself without its substrate or sustaining life, and final cause, *prayojana*. Like *jati* and *guna*, a *dravya*, substance may be regarded as the determining attribute of another in so far as it is its mode. The body is the mode of the embodied self. The body of a *deva*, man or animal is the mode of the self which sustains it, and uses it for its own satisfaction. Words connoting the physical bodies of the *jivas* connote also the *jivas* to which the bodies belong. Likewise, words connoting *prakrti* and *purusa* also connote *Paramatman* or the Highest Self of which they are the *prakaras*. The body is a mode of the self, and the self is a mode of the Highest Self. Thus all sentient and non-sentient beings are the self-differentiations or modes of the Absolute, as they are derived from It and depend on It for their own form and function.

The Brahman, with Its energizing creative will, differentiates into the aggregate of matter, with the finite self as its *sarira*, and as their informing spirit, becomes *sat* and *tyat* or self and material things. Thus, the Brahman evolves the heterogeneity of names and forms which make up the universe. All words, therefore, ultimately refer to the *Paramatman* with Its modal modification of *cit* and *acit*. On the principle of coordination, it follows that the Self or *prakarin* is one, though the *prakaras*, that is, *cit* and *acit* are many. That the Self is their substrate and supreme end is thus established.

It is to be borne in mind that Visistadvaita is not a mere adjectival theory of the Absolute. The finite self has not only an adjectival, but also a substantive, mode of being. Matter and self are the adjectives of the Absolute only in the sense that the attribute cannot be known apart from its substance or subject. The self has substantive being in the sense that it is different from the Absolute, as it is itself a centre of experience.

If the self is a mere *visesana*, the world of souls would be a sum of adjectives housed in the Absolute. But infinity of universals cannot constitute the universe with its infinite wealth of individual experience. The Brahman is the *visesya*, *prakarin*, and the world is the *visesana*, *prakara*. The two are indissolubly blended as the self and its body. The Brahman with the attributes of *cit* and *acit* in the gross state of creation is the same as the Brahman with the attributes of *cit* and *acit* in the *pralaya* state, because of the principle of non-difference of cause and effect and of the unity of coordination.

The self as *aprthak-siddha-visesana* has both modal dependence and monadic uniqueness. This view mediates between the pluralistic theory of self-subsistent and atomic realms, and the monistic theory of the Absolute as the substance that exists in and by itself without any determination. By knowing the Brahman,

the *visesya* or *prakarin*, every *visesana* or *prakara* that constitutes the universe is known. The view that the world of *cit* and *acit* is the *prakara* of the Brahman, the *prakarin* is deduced from the ultimate truth of the Brahman being the *saririn* and the world the *sarira*.

The ideal of the Brahman as the *saririn* is the key to the understanding of the Vedanta. The Brahmasutras, which constitute part of the Vedanta, are called the *sariraka-sastra*, the philosophy of pan-organism monism. The scriptural texts only aim at enabling the *mumuksu* to apprehend the Brahman to attaining eternal bliss. The truths of revelation are impersonal, *apauruseya* and infallible. They can be verified by intuitive experience, and are thus rationally justified.

The philosopher of Visistadvaita, with his genius for synthetic knowledge, intuits the *sarira-saririn* relation as the central truth of Vedanta. By knowing the Brahman as the *saririn* of all beings, everything is known. It is the thread, *sutra* that binds plurality into unity. It reconciles the apparent contradictions and confusions in spiritual texts, and secular experience. It solves the riddles of reason, and dispels the sorrows of *samsara*.

The *sadvidya* brings out the inner unity between the Brahman and the *jiva* by such similes as salt dissolved in water, honey gathered from different juices, rivers merging into the sea, the seed and the tree, the sap of the tree, etc. Just as the branches and leaves of the tree draw their sustenance from the life of the whole tree, the universe pulsates with the life of the All-Self. But the *antaryamividyā* (Ch III-7 Brhadaranyakopanisad) reveals explicitly the truth of the *sarira-saririn* relation. Ramanuja extols it as the *ghataka-sruti* that reconciles the extremes of pluralism and monism, and satisfies the highest demands of life in all its aspects.

The *brahmavadin* Yajnavalkya defines the nature of the Brahman in the immortal words of the *vidya*. He refers to the Brahman as the *antaryamin* and *amrta*, the indwelling immortal self that abides in all beings as their *antaryamin* and rules them from within. In defining the essential nature of the Brahman as the *saririn*, he makes an exhaustive division of the kinds of beings that form Its *sarira*. Starting from the elements that constitute the objective world of space-time, the division ends with the subjective world of the *jiva* or *vijnaana*, which is the subject of all knowledge.

The central teaching of the *antaryamividya* is enshrined in its last *mantra*. 'He who dwells in the *jiva* and with the *jiva*, whom the *jiva* does not know, whose body the *jiva* is and who rules it from within, He is the Self, Inner Ruler immortal.' In other words, the *antaryamin* is unseen, unheard, unperceived, and unknown. But He sees, hears, perceives and knows, not like us with the help of the senses, but directly without their help. There is no other seer like Him, no other hearer like Him, no other perceiver like Him, and no other knower like Him. Everything else is of evil. The objects of sense and the living beings are not self-existent and self-maintained, but spring from the Brahman. They are sustained by Its pulsating life, and exist for Its satisfaction.

This *mantra* is, as it were, the *mahavakya* of Visistadvaita in the sense that the universe has its meaning and motive only in the Brahman without the imperfections of the *sarira*.

The exact meaning of the *sarira-saririn* relation is worth detailed study. In ordinary language, the word *sarira* does not, like the word 'jar', denote a thing of a definite character. It applies to beings of entirely different make like worms, insects, moths, snakes, quadrupeds and human species. In the Veda, the term *sarira* is classified into higher and lower types on the principle of duration. The body of Isvara, *suddha-sattva*, time and the self are eternal, while the ephemeral *sarira* is either created for the *atman* or made

by *karman*. The created bodies of the Lord and the eternal, *nityasuris* belong to the former class, while the latter are subdivided into bodies which are both volitional and *karma*-made. The *karma*-made *sariras* are further classified into the immovable like trees and shrubs, and movable like *devas*, human beings and animals.

On the principle of division, according to genesis, the beings are seed-born, *udbhij-ja*; sweat-born, *sveda-ja*; egg-born, *anda-ja*; and womb-born, *jarayu-ja*. There are also *sariras* not produced in any of these four ways. In the case of bodies that are injured or paralyzed, there is no actual control and coordination. But the power of control is only obstructed for the time being and not destroyed.

The above classification leads to four categories of *sariras*. One is the physical bodies that are perceived by the senses, and traced to biological conditions. The second is the subtle bodies, *suksma-sariras* caused by *karman* and conserved in the moral order of the universe. The third is the gross elements of *prakrti* that form the physical basis of reality according to Vedantic cosmology as defined in the *antaryamividya*. The fourth is the spiritual bodies, *apaprta-sariras* which embody the spiritual universe.

Broadly speaking, the *sariras* comprise *cit* and *acit*. The Brahman is essentially *niravayava*, without the material forms of *prakrti*; *nirguna*, free from the *gunas* of *prakrti*; and unconditioned by *karman*. While the ephemeral *sariras* are subject to the perishing forms of matter and the moral vicissitudes of *karman*, the *saririn*, the *atman* is pure and perfect.

According to Ramanuja, as observed in the Vedarthasamgraha, that is called the *atman*, *saririn* which is always the container, *adhara* and controller, *niyantr* of another, and which uses it for its own satisfaction, *sesin*. The *sarira* is so called by reason of its being in its entirety the *adheya*, the *niyamya* and the

*sesa*. It is inseparable from the *saririn* and forms its *aprthak-siddha-visesana* or *prakara*.

To sum up, any substance which a sentient self can completely control and support for its own purposes, and which stands to the self in an entirely dependent relation is called its *sarira*. All sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute the *sarira* of *Paramatman*, for they live, move and have their being in Him and exist for His satisfaction. Owing to the entry of the Infinite into the finite as its *antaryamin* and the evolution of names and forms, each term that connotes the *sarira* of *Paramatman* also connotes Isvara, the *saririn*.

The Brahman is the source and sustenance of the self and uses it for Its satisfaction. It is only *saririn*. But the finite self is both *sarira* and *saririn* as it ensouls its body and is ensouled by its inner Ruler. When we say that the Brahman is the *saririn* of the self, we refer to the inner Self as different from the self of the *karma*-ridden *jiva*.

Thus the concept of *sarir-a-saririn* satisfies the triple *pramanas* of revelation, reasoning and sense-perception in their integral unity. It fits in with the ontological realism of *satkaryavada*, the grammatical rule of *samanadhikaranya*. It means that the logical correlations of *aprthak-siddha-visesana* are in tune with the *mimamsa* rules of interpretation. It furnishes the inspiring motive for the mystic communion by insisting on the ultimacy of the Brahman and the inner intimacy between the Brahman and the self. It offers spiritual service to all *jivas* owing to the similarity of their spiritual nature, and the kinship due to their one indwelling Ruler. In this way, every thought, word and deed refers ultimately to the *saririn* who is the life of our life and the light of the universe. This explains everything satisfactorily.

## The Brahman as *Sesin*

Ethical idealism or monism has the merit of establishing the unity of finite endeavour and the supreme end, and of viewing the *sesin* as both *upaya* and *upeya*. Its idea of the Holy One arouses the numinous sense of Isvara as the inspirer of awe revealed in His *visvarupa-darsana* to Arjuna. Ethical idealism instills reverence rather than love. It exalts will at the expense of feeling. As such it propounds that the good, the *satvikas* are saved and the wicked, the *tamasic* are destroyed. This ideal is not in line with the doctrine of Visistadvaita of universal redemption.

The metaphysics of Visistadvaita defines the Brahman, as an intellectual quest, as *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta*. Its ethics is based on the idea of *amalatva*, and its aesthetics on *ananda*. These five qualities may be grouped under the ideas of the Brahman as *adhara*, *niyantr*, *sesin* and *sundara*.

The Brahman and the self can be metaphysically analyzed, but cannot be physically divided owing to their inseparable relation. The Brahman is the *nimitta-karana*, the instrumental cause. It is the quality of moral eminence and holiness that does not equate the Brahman with the world. While *cit* and *acit* have their being in the Brahman, the Brahman is not in them. The Brahman exceeds their content and is absolutely perfect.

The value of this concept consists in the ethical realization that the self has the freedom to gain supremacy over its animal nature and attune its will to that of the Infinite. The self derives its being and form from the Brahman and depends on Its will for its functioning. Thus, the concept of *aadhyeyatva* brings out the truth of modal dependence of the self on the Brahman. On the other hand, *niyamatva*, the state of being ruled, explains the dependence of the self on the Divine Will.

The idea of the Brahman as *sesin* is the consummation of the moral consciousness. The Brahman is not only the ground of our being and the inner ruler, but is the goal of our entire endeavour. He is the endeavour, *upaaya* as well as the end of life, *upeya*. All thinking beings and objects of thought exist not in their own right, but as means to His satisfaction. *Acit* or *cit* is not a being-in-itself, but a being-for-another.

According to this concept, matter exists as a medium for self-realization. Self-realization is not for self-satisfaction, but for the satisfaction of the inner Self. In the religious view, *Paramapurusa*, the Supreme Self, wills the true and the good, and the conation is immediately self-realized. But moral life implies an aspiration which is not yet realized. This leads to the paradox of ethical religion that moral and spiritual life is both a pursuit as well as a possession.

The spiritual faith solves the riddle, if it considers that religion is the truth of moral life, and that the inner Ruler is Himself the way and the goal. Just as a moral law is the truth of the natural law, ethical religion is the philosophy of fruition in action. This is consummation of the view that the finite self has its being in the Brahman, belongs to It and exists for Its satisfaction, and the Brahman enters into the *jiva* as its self to realize It. The joy of such fruition is not a pleasure of self-adulation, but the divine quality. In the divine nature, activity and attainment go together.

While everything in the universe, *acit* as well as *cit*, has its being in the Brahman and depends on Its will for its form and function, *cit* alone is conscious of this sustenance and dependence. The self-consciousness of the *jiva* implies freedom of the will and reason by which the *atman* eliminates everything that belongs to the world of *prakrti* from the motive of conduct, and realizes its spiritual nature. If the *atman* falsely identifies itself with *prakrti* and its *gunas*, it becomes the slave of desire. But if it exercises its

moral freedom, it realizes its noumenal nature as a spiritual being. Then it attains self-mastery.

Every *cetana*, as a rational being, has the self-legislative will to free itself from the fetters of sensuous, spurious individuality. It is free to elevate itself to the autonomy of the pure *atman*. The true meaning of spiritual freedom thus secured by moral effort consists in the knowledge that the real author of all our actions is the inner Ruler of all beings. It also leads to the knowledge that every act so done is the adoration of the highest Self or *Paramapurusa*. The transition from the spiritual consciousness of the *atman* to the religious consciousness of the *Paramatman* is a transition from egocentric outlook to the theo-centric. The motive of conduct shifts from the self to its inner-self. As a result, every *karman* is consecrated as *kaimkarya*. In other words, the self gains its freedom to dedicate itself to the inner *atman* which is eternally free and self-dependent. In this way, the *sesa-sesin* relation between the finite and the Infinite is transformed and deepened into the relation between servant and master.

The *ahamkara*-ridden *jiva* regards itself as the centre of the universe and suffers from self-conceit and moral destruction. But the spiritual self attunes itself to the will of the Infinite. It conceives that there is only God and nothing else. He alone is omnipotent and His will is eternally self-realized. Every creature depends on His redemptive will for its being and function. But the self has the creature-consciousness that it is made in the image of God, and owes its nature and value to Him as the *svamin*. *Dasyattva* or the idea of being a servant of God is thus the *jiva*'s consciousness of the eternal self-dependence of Isvara and the dependence of the *jiva* on Isvara, and its free submission to His redemptive purpose.

From this point of view, the supreme end of life is attained not in the natural world of *prakrti* or the spiritual world of *atman*, but in the religious sphere of *Paramatman*. The idea of the *sesin*

gives the highest meaning to moral and spiritual experience as He is the means as well as the end of conduct. This is the true meaning of conduct as *kaimkarya*. The highest freedom of life lies in the selfless service to the Supreme who is the only Self without the second. When the *aham* or 'I' is offered to its inner Ruler as *svamin*, selfhood has its true meaning and culmination in consecrated service to the Lord. It is in the nature of self-oblation to Him, free from the taint of self-conceit and self-righteousness.

The principle of selfhood is central to religious experience. To know the self is to know the *sesin* who is in us and with us as the Self of our self and is the fruition of our moral and spiritual consciousness. Fruition is not the attainment of hedonistic pleasure, but is the end attained by self-effacement. It is the freedom of absolute self-surrender to the redemptive will of the *sesin* as *svamin*. Moral experience has its true meaning only in the religious consciousness that the *sesin* alone is the actor. This view provides for the freedom of the self, and also for the self-activity of the Lord as the ultimate determiner of human destiny. The Absolute is, therefore, the Self of selves, smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest.

The idea that the *sesin* is the means and the end of ethico-religious consciousness entitles Visistadvaita to be called the monistic philosophy of fruition and activism, for it does justice to the claims of the *jiva* as a self and the *sesin* as the Self of the self, and solves the dualism between human freedom and divine determinism (Spinoza defines 'the Self is the eye with which the Seer of all things sees Himself and knows Himself to be divine').

The *svamin-dasa* relation is rooted in the living faith that Bhagavan as *svamin* alone is the Lord of our being, and in the feeling of absolute dependence of the *jiva* on Him. *Dasya* or service is the self-gift of the *atman* that is the sovereign of the ethical

realm that exalts itself by submitting to the will of the *svamin*, as the servant of God.

The finite self is the *atman* which is different from matter, life and mind. It abides forever as an eternal entity. *Paramatman* is the Self of all selves, and is immanent in them without being tainted by their imperfections of *avidya* and *karman*. Isvara is the personality of *Paramatman*, as contrasted with the personality of the *jivatman*. The will of Isvara differs from the will of man, and He is absolutely pure and perfect with no self-contradiction. Man is made in the image of God, and not the other way.

*Prakrti* is a non-moral process of nature. Good and bad, and pleasure and pain are entirely determined by the moral law of *karman*. The divine purpose consists in the deification of the self by *Paramatman* entering into it and *atmanizing* it. The will of Isvara is redemptive, and the making of *muktas* is the supreme end of the mundane order. The Brahman as the *sesin* is not personal God, but *antaryamin*, the indwelling Self. The philosophy of religion expounds the identity of existence and value while it refers to *Paramatman* as the Absolute. The Absolute is the supra-personal self that enters into matter with *jiva* with a view to *atmanize* it. Thus the relation between the *sesin* and the *sesa* is both personal and spiritual. The concepts of *svamin* in terms of the Fatherhood and the Motherhood of the Deity bring out symbolically the spiritual experience of this relation in different forms.

In Judaism and other schools of monotheism controlled by ethical ideas, law dominates love. On the other hand, in mystic religions, love overflows law. But ethical monism coordinates the two sides by the non-dual unity of law and love. To the *mumuksu* who seeks God and is sought by Him, his faith in the Lord is like the fragrance of flower and luminosity of light. *Narayana* and Sri are indistinguishable to him. The ontological problem whether Sri is finite or infinite is not so important to the *mumuksu* as the problem

of *mukti*. From this point of view, the faith in Sri as the concretion of *karuna* and the heart of divinity is vital to the religion of redemption.

*Atmadasya* is realization of the *atman* as different from the bodily-self made by *prakrti* and the three *gunas*, and is the self-gift of the realized *atman* to the Lord who is its real Self. The self has monadic being, and is, at the same time, a mode of God. The more it sheds its spurious individuality made of *ahamkara* and the dross of sensuality, the godlier it becomes. *Atmadasya*, self-gift changes the egocentric outlook into Isvara-centric insight. In self-gift, exclusive selfishness alone is abandoned, and not the self.

*Dasyatva* connotes self-gift to God, its inner Ruler in the vertical sense, and the attribute of serviceability to other *jivas* in the horizontal sense. This truth may be formulated as the idea of God as divine Fatherhood and Motherhood, and the fraternity of all *jivas* as regards their essential nature. It brings out the spiritual intimacy between *Paramatman* and *jivatman* more truly than the ideas of Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man alone.

Every *jiva* is made in the image of *Paramatman*, and has His eightfold perfection in so far as it is not obscured by *avidya-karman*. All *jivas* are alike in so far as their essential intelligence is one. In their spiritual nature, all *jivas* are one as they are selves different from the embodiment of *prakrti*. As selves, all *jivas* are alike, though not identical, and in their essential intelligence they are one.

The social ethics of Visistadvaita is thus founded on the solidarity of the spiritual universe and on the fraternity of all *jivas*. The philosopher, who has realized the *atman*, has the spiritual consciousness of *samatva*, the similarity of all *jivas*. But, when the philosopher becomes religious, he knows that *Paramatman* is

the meaning of his self, and the means and end of his conduct. The self belongs to God, exists for His satisfaction, and surrenders itself to His redemptive mercy.

*Bhagavat-kaimkarya*, service to God implies service to all *jivas*. It extends in its meaning to *acarya-kaimkarya*, service to the *guru*, who has the mercy of God without His juridical severity. It also extends to service to the *bhagavatas* who have devoted their lives to the worship of the Supreme, and ultimately to all *jivas* owing to the indwelling of Divinity in their hearts.

Visnu pervades the universe as its Self and communicates His love to all beings. As such the whole world, *vaisnavized* as it were, pulsates with *daya*. The true *vaisnavite* prefers repeated births, as an opportunity for spiritual service to the suffering *jivas*, to his salvation. He never rests satisfied till all *jivas* are freed from the ills of life. He makes no distinction between the elect and the eliminated. This concept is in line with the Mahayana concept of Buddhism that the perfected being seeks to lead the other beings to salvation in preference to his own liberation from the cycle of life and death.

The ideas of Visistadvaita in regard to indwelling of God in all *jivas* and of *jiva-karunya* leading to *kaimkarya* to all *jivas* are more comprehensive than those of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. This is for the reason that the term *jiva* includes all living species, and the term *antaryamin* stresses the intimacy between the two *atmans*.

## The Brahman as *Niyantṛ*

In a true philosophy of religion, the Absolute of metaphysics is the Isvara of religion. The pure reason of metaphysics has to ally itself with the practical reason of moral consciousness, and become the philosophy of spiritual activism.

Consciousness is essentially co-native and purposive. It is more an act of the will than a fact of knowledge. Reality is rooted in ethical experience. It is ethical religion that takes to the heart of reality. It gives a new meaning to the Brahman by predicating the quality of *niyantrtva* to the inner ruler of all beings, who is absolutely pure and holy. Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of spiritual activism, defines the Brahman as Isvara who has purity and holiness as His essential quality, *apahatapaapmatva*.

A reconstruction of the theories of *dharma* and *niyoga*, expounded by the Mimamsakas, has developed the idea of Isvara as *niyantr*. *Karma-mimamsa*, the elucidation of Vedic *dharma* or duty, is the metaphysic of morals. It is different from *artha*, the goods of earthly life, and psychological hedonism which makes egoistic pleasure the end of conduct.

The important element in *karman* is the endeavour to achieve something, and *karman* is not the end itself. The Vedic ideal of *karman* lies not in the *phala* or the satisfaction of a desire, but in the moral law of *dharma* as a duty to be done. It is *kaaryataa-jnaana*, the knowledge of what ought to be done, which instills the sense of duty, the will to do it and the overt act. *Dharma* is thus not a means to an end, but is the end itself. It is a Vedic imperative of the form 'do it'. It is unconditional and absolute. The only motive for the Vedic 'ought' is the moral feeling of reverence for the law.

The right, as conformity to law, cannot, however, be separated from the good as an end to be attained. Every act has its

own result. The end of good conduct is the attainment of pleasure here or hereafter, and the avoidance of pain. Every act of *karman* leaves a moral effect which cannot always be perceived physically. It is to generate a new super-sensuous force called *apurva* or *niyoga* in the agent or action, which is a mediating link between the act and its function.

For example, if a person performs the *gyotistoma* sacrifice, the act creates an unseen super-sensuous potency in him leading to beneficial sensible results in the future such as happiness in the life hereafter. It is *apurva*, the unseen force that distributes rewards and apportions pleasure and pain to the agent in accordance with his *karman*. Owing to the plurality of effects, there should be a corresponding plurality of causes. As such it is not justifiable to trace them to a single supreme cause called Isvara. Each cause remains a potency leading to the attainment of its result. *Apurva* is the one eternal potency that manifests itself in different ways. The potency of the action takes sometime before it produces the desired effect.

Every act of *karman* presupposes the *kartr*, doer. This relation is due to *adhyasa* by which the immutable appears as the changing until *avidya* is sublated by *jnaana*. What is eternally existent is opposed to what is to be accomplished. *Jnaana* and *karman* can never coexist. It is only by sublating *avidya*, on which the dual consciousness of *karman* and *kartr* is based, that the knowledge of the existent Brahman is intuited.

The direct intuition of the Brahman can be attained only by a process of meditation on Its nature in the light of the Vedantic imperative. The self should be heard and reflected upon. Intuition and injunction relate to the same subject. The object of injunction and the subject of intuition are thus one. Therefore, by following the imperative, the *mumuksu* attains unity with the Brahman, freed from *avidya*.

On the other hand, *karman* is both for the *avidvan* and for the *vidvan*. While activity is the same for both, the inner attitude differs. The former is impelled by inclination and utilitarian ideas. It seeks pleasures of life here and hereafter. The activity is tinged with pain and is, therefore, ephemeral. But when *karman* is done in detachment, it becomes an offering to the Brahman, *brahmarpana*. It then becomes one with *jnaana* and the dynamic element in spiritual life.

*Jnaana* does not mean identity-consciousness. It connotes the intellectual knowledge of the Brahman and spiritual meditation on Its nature as *saguna* and not as *nirguna*. The Brahman is thus the perfect self that is apprehended as well as attained. By His self-transforming will, *parinama-sakti*, Isvara emanates into the finite as *cit* and *acit* without abandoning His moral perfection of purity. The spiritual object of the emotional process is to transform the finite self, removing its limitations of finitude.

Ramanuja criticizes the *nisprapancikarana-niyoga-vadin* more acutely. He enquires the *niyoga-vadin* whether the world to be destroyed is real or false. If it is false, it can be put an end to only by knowledge and not by *niyoga*, injunction. If the world is true, the injunction that seeks world destruction is either from the Brahman or different from the Brahman. If it is the former, the world cannot exist as the Brahman is eternal. If it is the latter, persons perish along with the world, and *niyoga* remains without a substratum.

The 'immanence' theory has the merit of recognizing the divinity of all realities. But it has the fatal defect of predicating evil and error to the Brahman. This theory leads to the concept that the Brahman is both the supreme ground of the universe and also the source of all imperfections. In such a case, He has to suffer from the sorrows of *samsara* in His own infinite way.

The absolutism of Visistadvaita thus differs from the Schools of Advaita and *Bheda-abheda* in its insistence on the equal value of metaphysics and morals. It also accepts the philosophic validity of divine immanence and the moral value of eminence.

To Ramanuja, the needs of ethical religion are as important as the demands of the dialectic method of metaphysics. With the aid of revelation-insight, he concludes that the absolute purity and perfection of the Brahman can be maintained only by affirming the reality of the finite self, and attributing the imperfections of life to its moral freedom. The empirical life of *samsara* is traceable, if at all, to the *upadhis* whether they are false or true. But, according to him, the true meaning of *avidya* or *upadhi* is contained in the moral concept of *karman*. Ethical religion restates the *adhara-adheya* relation of metaphysics in terms of *niyantr*, the ruler, and *niyamy*, the ruled and arrives at the concept of the Brahman as Isvara, the moral ruler of the universe who controls *maya* and is not conditioned by it.

Ramanuja repudiates and rejects the *niyoga* theories of the *purva-mimamsaka*, the *dhyana-niyoga-vadin* and the *nisprapancaniyoga-vadin* as mere mental constructions without any Vedantic foundation. He reformulates the system in the light of the theistic idea of Isvara.

*Niyoga* is a mechanical device without any spiritual content and immanent purpose and is, therefore, atheistic. It is to be reinterpreted as *niyantr* or the creator and the ruler of the universe who dispenses justice according to merit. The motive of conduct is an imperative to be obeyed. Besides, it is also a good to be attained. There can be no endeavour without an end.

The Vedantic imperative of *dharma*, the subject matter of the *purva-mimamsa*, *karma-vicara*, requires reorientation in the light of Vedantic philosophy of the Brahman. The end of moral

endeavour is the realization of the Brahman and the attainment of eternal bliss. The ethics of the *purva-mimamsa* has its value only when it is related to the Vedantic good as revealed in the *uttara-mimamsa*. And there is no contradiction between the two. The two *mimamsas* are really integral parts of the systematic whole. Their objective is to lead the seeker after truth, step by step, till he ascends to the Absolute.

Ramanuja, therefore, considers, similar to Bodhayana, that the entire Mimamsa Sastra has a definite spiritual meaning and value. The path of Vedic duty is the devious way to *svarga* and its pleasures are petty, *alpa* and perishing, *asthira*. But the path to the Brahman is straight and shining. It leads to eternal and infinite bliss. The ritual-sacrificial cult of the *Purva-Mimamsa* is frail and leaky, while the way to *brahma-jnaana* of the *uttara-mimamsa* leads to infinity. The *Veda-vadin* who follows *karman* thus realizes its perishing value and tries to become the *brahmavadin*.

The transition from *karma-vicara* to *brahma-vicara* thus involves temporal sequence as well as logical consequence. The seeker after truth goes from *karman* to the Brahman, from the world of petty and perishing pleasures to eternal bliss. The finite self, which is essentially *jnaanaanandamaya*, self-effulgent and blissful, forgets its nature in the process of *brahma-vicara* and finally attains immortality duly realizing its true nature and purpose.

A parable often quoted by Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika illustrates the point. A young prince strays from his royal father and joins a group of wild tribes. A trustworthy friend weans him away from the wicked surroundings and rejoins him to his father. On meeting each other, they are reunited in love. Likewise, the *atman*, which actually belongs to the Brahman, somehow superimposes on itself the idea that it belongs to *prakrti*, identifies itself with the body of a *jivi* in creation, and subjects itself to the wheel of *samsara* till it is made to realize its folly by an enlightened

*guru*. The *atman* retraces its steps, regains its self-knowledge and, freed from the fetters of *karman*, reenters its home in the Absolute. It is thus *brahmanized*.

The realization of the Brahman is an awakening as well as an attainment. The world of *samsara* is not subjective imagining like a dream, but an objective order. It is the same to all the infinite *jivas* experiencing it. The view that space and time are mental constructions and that the world is created and destroyed by the mind suffers from the fallacy of super-subjectivism and its fatal consequences. Sankara admits that there is difference in kind between the world imagined or ideally constructed by the mind as *jiva-srsti*, and the world par excellence created by Isvara. Similarly, what is of the waking consciousness is more real and valuable than that of dreams and of the inert state of sleep and stupor.

Life is real and arduous. *Mumuksutva* is not make-believe, but involves strenuous effort. Isvara is not the Brahman reflected in *maya*, or a *mayin* that suffers like the *jiva* from the hazards of the three states of consciousness and the hardships of cosmic evolution. On the other hand, Isvara is the inner ruler of all beings without any taint or trace of imperfection. He is eternally self-realized and enables the *jiva* also to realize itself.

*Mukti* is not like moon-like effulgence, *chandrodaya* that is an awakening from *avidya*. On the other hand it is like *suryodaya*, sun-light that is an awakening of God-consciousness by the destruction of *avidya-karman*. Visistadvaita steers clear of the extremes of the *purva-mimamsa* view of the mediacy of *niyoga* and the monistic view of the immediacy of Advaitic consciousness. It regards the Brahman as *niyantr*, who is the ruler of the moral universe and the supreme end of the spiritual life.

The central truth of the Upanisadic ethics that the Brahman is the inner ruler of all the subjects and objects of experience is in

the *antaryamin* text of the Brhadaraanyaka Upanisad. Uddalaka questions: 'Do you know the ruler who is the inner controller of the entire universe?' Yajnavalkya replies: 'That is the Brahman who is immanent in all beings as their eternal ruler, having the quality of *sarva-niyantṛtva*.'

Subala-Upanisad defines *Purusottama* as the Supreme Self, eternally pure and perfect. He sees without eyes, hears without ears, and knows everything without instruments of knowledge and the impediments of *avidya-karman*.

The *antaryamin-vidya* of the Vedantasutras states that the essential quality of the *Sarvatman*, the All-Self, is the attribute of inner ruler-ship, *niyantṛtva*, and immortality, *amartva* that differentiates Him from the finite centres of experience and their objects. The *Sarvatman* is metaphysically the *aadhaara* in which all beings live, move and have their being. It is thus the immortal ruler. The *Sarvatman*, the universal Self is identified with *Purusottama*, the Supreme Self of the universe, who wills the true and the good, and whose will is eternally self-realized. He is the ruler of the rulers. Because of Him, suns and stars and the whole universe move.

Cosmic ruler-ship cannot, therefore, belong to the non-sentient *pradhana* or the self-conscious *purusa*. The Mundaka Upanisad makes the point succinctly: 'Upon the same tree there are two inseparable birds of beautiful plumage. One of them on the lower branch eats the sweets and bitters of life in turn, and is bewildered by its own impotence. But the other on the top is the glorious Lord (Isa), the brilliant Maker who is ever serene and majestic, and by knowing Him, he shakes off his sorrows and shines in His glory'. Bhagavad-Gita narrates that, with a divine vision granted by the Lord, Arjuna beheld the cosmic form of Isvara, and was awe-struck by Its sublimity and infinity.

The idea of the Brahman as the inner-self of the self implies the eternal distinction among *prakṛti*, *purusa* and *Purusottama*, but denies their externality. As a philosophy of religion, Visistadvaita recognizes the equal reality of the three existents, but gives different values to them in the realm of ends.

As Sankara says, self-hood and internal ruler-ship cannot belong to *pradhana*, matter. It is a materialistic view of morals to regard the self as a mode of matter subject to the determinism of *prakṛti* and its *gunas*, and the causal chain of *karman*. Matter is not a thing in itself, but is a thing for the self. It is not a projection of thought or a non-ego. The physical order has objective reality. But the natural ego that identifies itself with the physical world has no moral value as it becomes the slave of sense and sensuality.

*Atman* is essentially free. But it cannot escape the determinism of *karman* and the endless perils of *samsara*. When it realizes its spiritual nature and attunes its will to the will of Isvara who is its inner Ruler, then it overrides the impact of the *karman*. Nature is adapted to the moral needs of the self. The moral law demands finally the immortality of the self and the existence of Isvara.

The difference between the two *atmans* lies in the truth that the *Paramatman* is eternal, while the empirical self, the individual *atman* can attain immortality only when it frees itself from the impact of *karman* and the earthly life. When the Supreme Self in a *jiva* thinks and acts as the *sariran*, it becomes the empirical self. On the other hand, when the empirical self, which has its own being, possesses the idea of *antaryamin* as the indwelling self of the *jiva*, it gets consummated in the Absolute. The Absolute of philosophy, which is the *Sat* without a second, is thus the same as the inner ruler of all beings, distinct from *prakṛti* and *purusa*, on account of His essential eternity.

Visistadvaita reconciles the claims of absolutism and theism by coordinating the values of epistemology based on 'intellectus', and ethics based on 'voluntus', defining the Brahman as *adhara* and *niyantr*. The first category expresses the ontological immanence of the Brahman as the *upadana-karana*, material cause. The second category defines the Brahman as the *nimitta-karana*, operative cause, stressing Its ethical eminence and holiness.

The Absolute is the one that is the meaning of the manifold. But It is not infected by the imperfections of the universe. As the sat, the Brahman is the all-inclusive whole. But as the *niyantr*, the Self, the Brahman is transcendently pure, perfect and holy. *Sat* is in space-time, and not as space-time. It is the self. On the other hand, *prakrti* is *parinama*-ridden while *purusa* is *karma*-ridden. *Paramatman* is the All-Self, but is absolutely free from the mutations of matter and the ethical defects of empirical self. Thus He is the *Purusottama*. There is no other good than God, and the supreme end of life consists in attaining godliness.

When the Brahman is considered as abiding in the *jiva* as its *antaryamin*, the moral idea is to transfigure its mind-body into a living temple of the Lord, *brahmapuri*. This is to *brahmanize* the *jiva*. The Infinite does not lose Its infinity by residing in the finite and redeeming it from its evil nature. There is no contradiction in the coexistence of two selves in the same body.

The *jiva* realizes its nature as the *atman*. It attunes itself to the will of the Supreme Self. The Brahman is alogical and amoral. And there is a real progression in spiritual life from the logical to the alogical or intuitional. Similarly there is a progression from the moral idea of *karman* and merit-demerit to the amoral idea of essential immortality. The Being that is beyond space-time as the greater than the greatest seeks Its abode in the heart of all sentient beings in order to impart Its infinity and eternal life to them.

The subject-object relation is applicable to ethical as well as intellectual experience. The ultimate subject of every moral judgment is the inner ruler or the *Paramatman*. To elicit this truth, the Gita analyses every act of *karman*, voluntary action into five factors of the body, namely, the vital functions, the mind, the sense organs, the finite self and Isvara.

The body composed of the five elements provides the physical foundation for moral life. The five *pranas*, the vital functions, sustain the life of the bodily organism, as without the *prana* the physiological organs cease to function. The mind and the sense organs, in their volitional aspect, represent the dynamic side of moral endeavour. The finite self with its freewill is the doer of the deed and is the subject of moral experience. It uses the tools of action when it chooses to do so, and does not use them when it ceases to act. But the final subject of all actions from the religious point of view is the inner Divinity that is in the self as the Creator of creators. The ethical religion loses its integrity if any of the above factors is omitted. Consequently, the philosophy of morals will be fractured.

The true *aham*, ego is a serene spiritual self as realized in the state of liberation. But *ahamkara*, egotism is the pseudo-self of *prakrti* that claims to be Isvara Himself. It betrays its egocentric nature, fights against goodness and seeks to destroy the moral and spiritual order of the universe.

What is generally considered the fight between God and the devil is really the fight in our moral nature between the soul power of the *atman* and the brute force of the *ahamkara*. The moral philosopher recognizes the religious foundation of morals and discovers Isvara as the real subject of all action, perceived in the light of the Upanisads. It gives a new orientation to moral and spiritual life. For it shifts the centre of activity from the little 'I' of *ahamkara* to the absolute 'I' that is the real Ruler of the cosmos.

The living body is the *ksetra*, the arena of moral warfare. There the conflicting desires fight for supremacy while the self deliberates, decides and acts on account of its free will. Finally it knows the truth that its will is the fulfillment of the Divine Will.

Freedom and activity belong to *purusa* and not to *prakrti*. If it is said that activity is a feature of *prakrti*, all *jivas* have to experience all actions as *prakrti* is common possession of all *jivas*. This is absurd. The world of *prakrti* is the common theatre for moral and spiritual life. It is, therefore, the object and not the subject of experience.

In the transition from ethics to religion, moral freedom is transfigured into spiritual attunement to the will of the Supreme Self. The self as the *kartr*, free agent becomes the willing instrument of the highest Self (*Para*-the Supreme). The empirical self, in a sense, suffers from the dilemma of determinism. As a mode of matter, its action is subject to causal necessity and is not free. As a mode of the highest Self, its activity depends on the inward Ruler who, by His wonderful *maya*, moves all creatures as if they were mere machines. The self, as a passive instrument of Isvara, becomes a conduit of His cosmic energy.

Kousitaki Upanisad expounds forcibly the concept of divine determinism and pre-destination thus: 'Whom the Lord elects to lead upwards from these worlds, He makes him do a good deed. Whom He elects to lead downwards from these worlds, He makes him do a wicked deed.' Freedom of the self is thus a fiction from the religious as well as the scientific points of view.

Duty is the command of the inner voice, and the imperative implies the obligation to obey it. Sribhasya illustrates this truth by an analogy of joint ownership of the same property by two persons. A and B jointly own a property. If B wishes to transfer the property to C, he can do so only after obtaining the consent of A. The

consent of A depends on the imperative, initiative and persuasive effort of B who desires the transfer. Similarly, Isvara permits its 'other' to use its freedom. At first, He is a silent seer, unaffected by good and evil, but enters into the moral life of the *jiva*, and permits it to exercise its freedom. He then apportions pleasure and pain which are the fruits of action according to desert.

Ethical religion supports the doctrine that the self is not a thing or means to an end. Rather, it is a *kartr* that can choose its way in a conflict of desires without drifting between destiny and divinity. It does not follow *karman* or *sastra* (which connotes an imperative or moral 'ought'), but has the free will to choose its own career. When moral realm is autonomous and cannot be reduced to the physical realm or religious absolutism, the doctrine of determinism does not stand ground.

Ethical religion reconciles ethics and religion by its conclusion that the self acquires moral sovereignty over its animal inclination with a view to surrendering itself to the Supreme Self, which is the ultimate subject of moral endeavour. In that event, the two wills coexist as one will. The finite will is then in tune with the Infinite. There is no contradiction in such coexistence or self-communication. Anyway, this view is preferable to the illusion theory of ethics, which concedes that the Lord, with super excellent limiting adjuncts, rules the *jivas* with inferior limiting instincts. This illusion theory of ethics makes morality a make-believe and *moksa-sadhana* a semblance.

To sum up, the Brahman, the all-inclusive One, is Isvara, the inner Controller of all beings. Ontologically, the Brahman is the Life of our life and the True of the true. This view stresses the idea of divine immanence which pulsates through all beings and sustains their form and function.

Reality as the Brahman has the quality of truth, which is the True of the true, of self-consciousness which is ever self-effulgent as the Light of lights, and of infinity as the Creator of creators and the Eternal of eternals.

Truth is an essential quality of reality, and is not reality. The idea of *niyantr* gives rise to the idea of the ethical eminence of the Brahman. It postulates that the finite is not only rooted in the Infinite, *svarupasrita*, but is also controlled or directed, *sankalpasrita* by It.

By His entry into the *jiva* as its inner self, He is at once the Sovereign and Saviour of all *jivas*. Like a ruler that inspects a prison as a freeman, the Brahman is the ruler of the dark chamber. He is within all beings, and without, near and yet far. In view of the unity of purport of all Vedic knowledge, the terms *sat*, *antaryamin* and the Brahman connote the same Being. In the light of the *chaagapasu-nyaaya*, these terms ultimately connote Narayana as the Supreme Self.

## The Brahman as Redeemer

Isvara is not the illusory highest or the highest conceptual interpretation of the Absolute. Isvara is the ethical highest in us. His omnipotence makes for righteousness. The will of the Almighty is not an arbitrary fiat, but is rooted in justice.

*Sastra*, the only authority for discerning spiritual truths, attributes absolute power to the Brahman which transcends human understanding. But the idea of the Brahman with infinite benevolence cannot be reconciled with omnipotence. It may be contended that no merciful Divinity would ever create a universe full of inequality and cruelty (*vaisamy* and *nairghrnya*). The existence of evil and unmerited suffering appears as a blot on the Almighty. This is treated as evidence of the reign of a malignant power rather than of a benign ruler. This is a serious charge against theism.

Badarayana, the Vedantin, traces evil to the moral responsibility of the *jiva*. He explains that the inequalities in the moral experiences of men and communities, and the injustices are the outcome of their *karman*, and are not due to any caprice in the Creator. *Parasara* says that the material cause of creation is the *karman* of the *jiva*. The law of *karman* is the law of causation on the moral level, and every being reaps what it sows. *Karman* and its juridical rigour are so remorseless that even the gods cannot escape the consequences of their *karman*.

The law of *karman* does not connote any mechanical or mathematical necessity. It is not that each deed is the child of the past, and the parent of the future. But it presupposes a free agent who is accountable for its actions. The moral judgment is passed not on the deed, but on the doer doing the deed. The law of *karman* recognizes the intrinsic value of moral freedom.

When ethics develops into a religion, it becomes a theodicy with a moral and spiritual faith in the law-giver. Duty is a divine command. Its transgression is a moral perversity or evil that deepens into sin, and merits punishment. Righteousness is fulfilled in the law of retribution. The demerit in the soul arouses moral disapproval and incurs wrath. It is by punishment alone that the righteousness of the law is vindicated.

But the picture of a vindictive God who punishes the offender in the everlasting hell-fire is revolting to the religious consciousness of Ramanuja. The will of the Almighty is rooted in the righteousness by which He dispenses justice according to the merit of the doer. Theology insists on the absoluteness of the Divine Will, and ethics on the value of righteousness.

Ethical religion defines Isvara as *satya-kama* and *satya-samkalpa*, who wills the true and the good, and realizes them at once. The view that God wills the good is preferable to the view that what God wills is good. The former view makes Him righteous and the latter despotic. The idea of Isvara as *karma-phala-datr*, the Lord that judges man according to his *karman*, steers clear of the evils of deism. The theory of an external Designer or Absolute Deity, who makes the world and lets it go, is repugnant to ethical religion. So is the idea that God forever fights with the devil, or that devil exists as an impediment to goodness to be finally overcome by it.

The view of Ramanuja that Isvara is the operative cause and the *karman* of each *jiva* the material cause of the diversity of moral experience, satisfies the needs of ethical transcendence and logical immanence. The Brahman as the *sat* is the immanent unity of the universe. *Parama-Purusa* is transcendentally pure and perfect. The evils of life are traceable to the moral freedom of the finite self. If it is said that evil is an illusion that envelopes the Brahman, a limitation that conditions the Infinite, it speaks of a

defect in the Absolute. It carries no conviction and admits of no religious satisfaction.

Ramanuja traces *avidya* to *karman*, instead of *karman* to *avidya* as Sankara does. Finally, he equates the two. Ramanuja thus attributes the illusions and ills of life to the *jiva*, and leaves the Absolute perfect.

The bottom-line of the ethical religion of Visistadvaita is the theory of Isvara as Redeemer, *Raksaka*. The idea of Isvara as *karma-phala-datr*, who apportions pleasures and penalties in exact proportion to the moral worthiness of the doer, is legal conception and does not admit of religious consolation or hope of salvation.

Evil exists as a fact of experience. The *mumuksu* seeks to destroy it by active endeavour. Physical evil is equated with suffering, and may not be the effect of sin. Sin may result in suffering, but suffering may not be due to sin. But moral evil arises from the violation of moral law. It deepens into sin when duty, which is a divine command, is violated. Duty is the voice of God in the will of man. It is a sin to omit what is commanded, and commit what is prohibited, as it is an offence against Isvara. The sinfulness of sin is so deep that it cannot be exhausted by expiation. The law of recompense has religious value only when righteousness is fulfilled in redemption.

Justice is not merely tempered with mercy, but is consummated in it. The aim of punishment is not retribution, but redemption. Punishment, *dandana* is *daya-karya*, the work of compassion. Punishment is for the redemption of the wrong-doer from his career of sin by the inflow of divine grace, *krpa*. Forgiveness does not cancel *karman*. It transforms it by the organic blending of goodness and mercy.

The grace of the Redeemer is not a supernatural potency that is infused into the sinner from without. The law of *karman* finds its fulfillment in the redemptive grace of God. Forgiveness is the foundation of the moral law. Redemption from sin is its religious fruition. This view overcomes the dualism between the supernatural realm of *krpa* and the moral realm of *karman*. There is no contradiction or discontinuity between the supernatural and the natural, as the former is a consummation of the latter.

While philosophy explains the quest of Reality by a *mumuksu* through the self, religion explains the quest of the self by the Redeemer. The idea of the Brahman interested in *brahmanizing* the *jiva* is the bottom-line of religion. God seeks the self even more than the self seeks God, and God is aptly called the 'Hound of Heaven'. To the logical intellect, the Brahman is beyond understanding, description and definition. But to religious consciousness, He is the inescapable Redeemer who, in His infinite mercy, assumes suitable forms to recover, and reunite with, the lost self. The ascent of the self to the Absolute is not as valuable as the descent of the Absolute into evolutionary forms and into humanity.

The five forms of the Brahman known as *para*, *vyuha*, *vibhava*, *antaryamin* and *arca* are not emanation categories, but concrete expressions of divine *krpa*. *Daya* is eternal and infinite. It incarnates into humanity and is immanent in all living beings. *Para-Brahman* is the self-realized Absolute as the Eternal of eternals, formless, changeless and transcendental.

In *Paramapada*, matter exists without its mutability. There time exists as eternity, and the *mukta* lives without the moral limitations of *karman*. In that divine life, there is no scope for *daya*. If everything is perfect, perfection has no meaning or value. But there is more joy in the pursuit of the lost self than in the possession of the free selves of *Paramapada*. As such, the

metaphysical Absolute becomes *Vaasudeva*, the perfect, to satisfy the meditation needs of the *mumuksu*.

*Srsti* is a redemptive process. After the refreshment of the *pralaya*, when *srsti* recommences, the *jiva* wakes up to moral activity, enters on a new life, and is given a fresh opportunity for attaining freedom. The making and the unmaking of the universe thus reveal the redemptive mercy of the Redeemer. As such, cosmology is to be reinterpreted as a *daya-sastra*, the philosophy of redemption.

Another concrete form of *daya* is the immanence of the Brahman in the hearts of all beings as their *antaryamin* without being affected by their evils. It transforms the perishing body into a living temple of the Redeemer. The Supreme Self manifests Itself as *Vaasudeva* in such body in the interests of the meditation needs of the devotee.

Incarnation is the invasion of divine mercy in a supernatural way into the history of humanity with a view to redeeming it from its sinful course. The sinner is made righteous by the infusion of grace into his inner nature so that the burden of sin is removed forever.

*Avatara* or *vibhava*, incarnation is a concrete manifestation of *krpa*, kindness. It is the periodic invasion of *krpa* into all species, mainly humanity, when evil triumphs over goodness and creates a crisis in moral life. An *avatara* is the Redeemer embodied in human form with a view to recovering humanity from its sinfulness.

The Bhagavad-Gita is the exposition of the *avatara* of Sri Krsna, the perfect incarnation. The value of the incarnation of Krsna is the intuitive vision, the soul sight of the Redeemer as its self. Such soul-sight destroys *avidya-karman*. The Gita guarantees God to everyone and offers universal salvation. Even an

uncompromising infidel like Sisupala becomes worthy of the grace of the Incarnation.

The theory of the *avatara* is ultimately a spiritual truth entirely opposed to the geographical idea of descent, the evolutionary idea of the progress of *purusa* into *Purusottama*, or the super-naturalistic view of a miraculous advent against the laws of nature. Visistadvaita is faithful to the Gita when it expounds the *avatara* as the invasion of the grace of the Redeemer to humanity in moments of moral crisis with a view to arresting the progress of social disruption, redeeming the sinners from their sinfulness, and commune with the devotees who thirst for His living presence.

Besides the historic incarnations, there are permanent incarnations known as *arcaa* or the concretion of the *krpa* consecrated by *bhakti* and *mantra*. *Arcaa* worshipped in temples is the reservoir of the redemptive mercy of the divine, who enters into a formless form of His own without being effected by the changes of *prakrti* and *purusa*.

*Arcaa* is a Vaisnavite idea, often misinterpreted as image worship or idolatry. To the idealist, image worship is the projection of the idea of God into forms of matter or a symbolic representation of spiritual truths. The pantheist who sees God in everything sees Him in the image as well. The monotheist may not like the anthropomorphic view that humanizes the transcendental Holy. The non-dualist accepts that the Infinite cannot be spatialized and localized. But he draws a different conclusion by recognizing the psychological needs of the devotee, and conceding the distinction between the two Brahman. Sankara says that the Lord may, when He pleases, assume a bodily shape formed of *maya* in order to gratify thereby His devout worshippers. The contemplation of God in the form of sacred *saligrama* is not, therefore, contrary to reason.

Visistadvaita does not accept the theory of two standpoints with its double view of philosophy and religion. It is also against monotheism that attributes qualities to Divine-personality, but denies His divine form. If the theory of two standpoints is true and the real needs of the *mumuksu* are conceded, it logically follows that the Brahman is *nir-avayava* and *nirguna* in the spiritual sense, that It is beyond *prakrti* and its constituent qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and *saguna* in the religious sense that He is the redeeming self. The Infinite finitizes Itself by having an *aprakrtasarira* or eternal formless form of Its own for the sake of the finite self that seeks it. This divine form is the concrete embodiment of the will to save humanity. It is made of love, and not of matter or *karman*. It is not a concession to the mass mind steeped in *avidya*.

The Infinite is the boundless Lord of tenderness and compassion. Self limitation of the Infinite in the form of incarnation enriches the divine nature instead of conditioning or diminishing its content. The Incarnation with sun-like splendour individualizes the form as special providence with a view to gratifying His devotees. The Incarnation is the image of the Infinite, and not in the image. The divine form is called *subha-asraya* as it purifies and is accessible to devotees.

The *arcaa* is the divine form perceptually obvious and accessible to all. It is in the nature of self-manifestation, and is a miracle of mercy. The five forms of the Brahman as *para*, *vyuha*, *vibhava*, *antaryamin* and *arcaa* are equally real in the philosophical sense. From the point of view of religious value, each succeeding self-manifestation may be more valuable to the *mumuksu*.

Visistadvaita equates the Brahman and the *antaryamin* of the Upanisads with Vaasudeva of the *Pancaratra*, the Bhagavan of the Puranas, the *avatars* of the Itihasas and the *arcaa* of the Alvars. It is equally opposed to the theories of sublation and subordination.

Ramanuja considers that the Brahman, *Bhagavan*, *Paramatman* and *arcaa* connote the one Absolute as the perfect Self whose sole aim is to perfect the finite self and make it immortal. The self-manifestations of the Absolute are, therefore, not due to self-contradiction, *bheda-abheda* limitation or emanation.

The redemptive motive of *daya* dominates the infinite perfections of Isvara. This view is a reorientation of the metaphysical qualities of *satya*, *jnaana* and *ananta*, the ethical idea of *amatva* or purity, and the cosmological ideas of omnipotence and omniscience.

The Brahman transcends the form and matter of *prakrti*. He is, therefore, *nir-avayava* or formless, and *nirguna* or without attributes. He embodies Himself as *daya* to redeem the *jiva*. God of *daya* is unique and without a second. His mercy endures forever and is showered on all.

The infinite perfections of the Absolute become valueless without *daya*. The Lord blesses the pure in heart, that follow the way of righteousness and keep the Vedic commandments. He also saves the sinner that transgresses the law, and has done evil in His sight. He is love embodied, and the sole refuge of those in desolation and distress. As judge, the Lord saves the righteous. As the deliverer, with His infinite loving kindness, He seeks the iniquitous and forgives their transgression. His forgivingness overtakes His juridical severity. He, therefore, redeems the wicked, and gives succour to the lowly and the meek.

*Daya* inspires confidence in God as the God of salvation. It soothes the broken heart and the contrite spirit. The unique feature of Vaisnavite experience of mercy is its universality. Deliverance works in various ways. It enriches the nature of the Deliverer who is referred to in varied ways.

He is *sarva-bhuta-suhrt*, the friend of all beings. He is *parama-udaara*, all bountiful. He is *gambhira*, whose quality of mercy cannot be measured qualitatively. He is *sulabha*, easily accessible to all *jivas*. He is *aasrita-para-tantra*, one who depends on His devotees. He is *saumya*, approachable by all irrespective of their birth and worth.

He embodies the qualities of *sausilya*, *vatsalya*, *mardava*, *sthairya*, *karunya*, *madhurya*, *audarya*, *aarjava* and *sauhardra*. *Sausilya* is the intimacy between the infinitely great Isvara and the infinitesimally small *jiva*. *Vatsalya* is the tenderness and affection that makes it forget the sinfulness of the sinner in spite of the divine omniscience. The Lord of love may tolerate physical but not moral evil. *Mardava* is the softness of love that cannot bear the pangs of separation from its lost self, and includes sweet reasonableness.

*Sthairya* is the will to save the postulant in spite of his sinfulness. *Karunya* is the sympathetic love of the Redeemer to seek and heal the afflicted *jiva* and give it succour and stability. *Madhurya* is the inner sweetness that ever resides in the Saviour, who conquers evil by His seductive beauty and love, and imparts His bliss to the *jiva*.

*Audarya* is the quality of the bestowal of boons as a privilege granted to the Giver of all good by His beloved, without end. *Aarjava* is the full, frank and free expression of the redemptive quality without reservation. *Sauharda* is the heartfelt desire to help all beings and redeem them from their sinfulness. The motive of all these mercies is to transforming the nature of Isvara as righteous judge into the Deliverer or Universal Saviour.

The Visistadvaita philosophy of the *sat* without a second transforms itself into the *Vaisnavite* pantheism that extols Vaasudeva as the All-Self, and the *Srivaisnavite* theism that equates Godhead with the dual-self of *Laksmi-Narayana* or *Sriyah-pati*.

This transition is the self-expression of the inner redemptive necessity that follows from the divine nature of *daya*.

The Brahman, who is beyond *prakrti* and *purusa*, expresses Its will to redemption in Its twofold spiritual form of the Lord and Sri that are philosophically inseparable, though functionally distinguishable. Love rules the cosmic Ruler, and Sri resides in the ever-blooming lotus of love. Sri is the very heart of the divine nature.

Isvara rules the world by His relentless law of *karman*. His holy wrath against the evil-doer is inescapable. But the redemptive love of *krpa* overpowers the rigour of *karman*. This leads to destruction of the evil, but saves the evil-doer. The Lord rules by law, and Sri rules by love. The love of law and the law of love are so intertwined in the divine nature as to render nugatory any attempt at the philosophic analysis of their exact nature. The law of justice is eternally wedded to the might of mercy.

Ethics insists on the reign of *karman*, and religion on the absoluteness of *krpa*. But ethical religion reconciles the claims and counter-claims of *karman* and *krpa* regarding the law of righteousness as the root of moral and spiritual endeavour and deliverance by *daya* as its fruition. *Daya* changes goodness into godliness by its inner mediating link.

*Karman* is a criticism of caprice and is rooted in justice. But, in its relentlessness, it affords no hope of deliverance. It might lead to despair. *Krpa*, on the other hand, is a criticism of *karman*, and is rooted in forgiving-kindness. But, in its inner flow, it may afford no scope for moral responsibility and contrition. But the dual principle of *karman* and *krpa* overcomes their dualism by harmonious interplay. In this situation, love pervades law and law pervades love. In this interdependence lie the stability of the moral order and the guarantee of the universal salvation.

Visistadvaita discusses the question of origin and meaning of evil. Physical evil is suffering due to hunger, poverty, disease, misery inflicted by nature as earthquakes, and pain caused by supernatural agencies. It is classified as *adhyaatmika*, *aadhibhautika* and *aadhidaivika*, centrally, peripherally or supernaturally originated.

Physical evil is contrasted with moral evil. Suffering is not always considered the consequence of wickedness. Selfless workers devoted to the welfare of others often court suffering. Further, pain is not always a punishment for transgressing the moral order. Matter is not essentially evil. Embodiment is invariably conjoined with misery. But there is no causal or necessary relation between the two. Embodiment is an evil only when it is the result of the false identification of the *atman* with the body on account of *avidya-karman*. But it is not so when it is sought voluntarily by the Lord or the *mukta*.

The theory that Isvara has created the world to provide for human wants and that He bestows His wealth on virtuous men assigns a commercial value to *karman*. Such approach destroys its intrinsic worth. On the other hand, it is not true to say that evil is a blessing in disguise, and that pain is beneficial, especially when it is unwarranted.

Moral evil is the violation of the laws of conduct based on rational determination. It is rooted in sensuality and the self-will of *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is the demonic propensity in man that impels him to gratify the lust of the flesh and indulge in self-aggrandizement. It is, therefore, the matrix of all moral evil.

The quality of *sattva* impels virtue. It induces the moral agent to choose a course of conduct that avoids egoism, and promotes the ends of social welfare. A good act is better than a good motive or intention. But a wicked motive is worse than a

wicked act. It is worse when it deepens into villainy. It taints the inner moral nature, and subtly infects society itself. The demonic man makes evil his good, and is moved by malignity and cruelty for their own sake, and without any motive. Moral evil converts into sin when it is a deliberate transgression of a moral law regarded as a divine command. It is a revolt against the law of God.

The world of *samsara* is the battleground between *dharma* and *adharma*, which is considered the fight between good and evil. Zoroastrianism refers to the eternal warfare between the God of good and light, and the Demon of evil and darkness. This eternal warfare involves dualism opposed to the theistic idea of Redeemer. Even the view of Christian theology that Satan fights against God, and that man suffers from original sin does not help in solving the problem of evil.

Good and bad are mutually exclusive. This logical truth of exclusiveness applies to the realm of ethical religion. This becomes the basis of the division of the persons into the good and the wicked, based on the principle of exclusion or antagonism. The good man keeps the commandments of God, and thus merits His loving kindness attaining salvation. The sinner who offends God is considered a heretic and hurled into eternal hell-fire.

Ethical religion affirms the theory of predestination. It is more pronounced when it holds that the Lord Himself elects some to pursue the good and follow the path of liberation, and others to follow the path of malignity and sin leading to torture in hell.

From the metaphysical point of view, evil is, but ought not to be. When God is good, the existence of evil and other imperfections has to be traced to the freedom of the finite self. Moral freedom is a real choice between different possible courses of action. The *jiva* is responsible for the choice of evil. But Isvara is responsible, not for the choice between good and evil, but for

the pleasures and pains that follow the deed. The existence of evil in the divine plan is only a bare possibility. But it is the self that makes the possible actual, and enjoys the fruits of its *karman*.

The nature of *karman* determines pleasure or pain and it varies from person to person and from time to time. The hedonistic value of a thing is relative to the moral differences caused by *karman*. Thus it is the finite self that is accountable for the existence of evil and the experience of pain. The Supreme Self is in no way concerned with this experience, as It is ever pure and perfect.

But the ultimate problem of evil is not solved by analyzing it into the physical, moral and metaphysical aspects, and making the finite self accountable for its existence. To say that Isvara permits the possibility of evil, which He could have prevented, does not free Him from His responsibility. This difficulty results in the dualism between human will and divine will, and their collision.

The existence of evil as an instrument of goodness having an educative value is still a menace to theism as an ethical religion. If evil is real, it denies the omnipotence of the Lord and makes Him finite and helpless.

Ramanuja recognizes the equal claims of pure reason and practical reason. He rejects the monism that traces evil and error to the heart of reality, as wild and vicious. To him, it is an outrage on the moral and religious consciousness. To him, evil is a grim reality. But he throws the blame on the finite self. He absolves the Absolute from any taint and trace of evil.

Evil is neither an original sin nor an inherited propensity. It is neither an illusion nor a self-limitation. But it presupposes freedom of choice. To the *mumukshu* seeking liberation from the *samsara*, the removal of evil and sin is more urgent than the logical

analysis of its cause. When he develops divine vision, *brahma-dristi*, he sees God everywhere and good in all beings.

What a man sows, he reaps. *Karman*, therefore, involves the inexorable law of retribution. There is no hope of escape from the chain of necessity. It is this aspect of *karman* that savours of fatalism, and breeds pessimism and passivity. But it applies only to a part of *karman* called *prarabdha-karman*, which has already been set in motion, like the birth of an individual.

Every *karman* presupposes a *kartr*, who determines himself. In every voluntary situation he deliberates on possible alternatives, and decides on a particular course of action. The act of decision is an evidence of moral freedom and value. The moral self is not a phenomenalized thing of *prakrti*, subject to the law of causality. But he is a person, self-legislative in nature. He can attain self-sovereignty by subduing his animal nature.

Thus, an individual has the freedom to grow into the goodness of God or lapse into wickedness to be the slave of sensibility. Freedom of the self presupposes the possibility of self-realization as different from the bodily self of *prakrti*. When the moral self thus realizes its spiritual nature, the theory of *karman* acquires a religious motive based on the redemptive nature of *krpa*. Then work is transfigured into worship of God. Freedom is the gift of God so that it may be turned into the gift of the self to God, which is its inner Self. *Karman* is then consecrated into *kaimkarya*. The conflict of the two wills ceases when the finite self attunes itself to the Infinite.

The relation between *karman* and *krpa* involves dualism between the principles of righteousness and redemption. It indeed constitutes the paradox of Srivaisnavism as an ethical religion. In all humility, it accepts it as holy mystery, which cannot be solved by logic but can only be solved by direct divine experience. The

*mumuksu* cannot rely on the inner light of reason without the grace of God and the *guru*.

But the ethics of *karman* and *dharma* is rooted in the religion of redemptive *krpa*. The moral feeling of the law of retribution is a failing which gives way to the religious faith in the Lord of redemption. The religious faith is that the world is not the domain of *karmic* necessity. On the other hand, it is the living expression of the incarnation of mercy.

The Christian religion of redemption is the gospel of the forgiveness of sin. According to it, the propensity to evil is an innate depravity. The evil deepens into sin, when it is a transgression of divine law. Sin does not arise from ignorance or error. It is the sense of guilt arising from the collision of the human will with the divine, and is blameworthy entailing punishment. It is the doer that is punished, not the deed.

The hideousness of sin is a measure of the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness is the assurance of mercy, and the free gift of God. It is the offer of pardon to the sinner. To consider that mercy is the reward of merit is only legalistic. 'To merit mercy' is self-contradictory, for it breeds the bargaining temper. Justification for mercy is the work of God, and human merit does not win it. The good man has the consciousness of 'desert', and does not look for mercy. It is the sinner that seeks mercy, that God pardons.

Forgiveness and penitence go together. The fact that sin is forgiven presupposes the faith that it is forgivable. Penitence is what accounts for mercy. It is analyzed into three factors, namely, the knowledge of the sinfulness of sin, the feeling of sorrow resulting from the thought of sin and the will to abandon the way of sin by seeking the mercy of God, the Redeemer. Human history is the process of the pardoning God incarnate in human society, with a view to annexing it to God pardoning its sins.

## 7. Cosmology

The *sadvidya* of Chandogya-Upanisad explains Vedantic cosmology. It states that the Brahman is the ground of the universe by knowing which everything is known. Deity is the beginning of the evolutionary process and its end.

The non-difference between the Brahman and the universe is brought out in illustrations like a lump of clay or a bar of gold entering into different states in succession, and thereby assuming different configurations. The one transfigures into the many, and the process continues. What exists as a real possibility in the subtle state becomes actualized in the gross state. It is the non-differentiated, which exists without name and form, that becomes differentiated. This principle explains the true meaning of cosmology, and shows the unity of the causal relation.

The Upanisads repeatedly proclaim the truth of causal immanence in different ways - 'All this indeed is the Brahman'. 'There is no plurality here'. 'When the Self is known, all this is known'.

By knowing the cause, the effect is known. By knowing the Brahman, the Absolute, the universe with its manifold differences is known. This cosmological unity leads to the spiritual intuition that the Brahman is the cosmic ground and also His own inner Self. The Upanisadic dictum 'Thou art That' is a realization that the cosmic ground is the same as the inner self of the *jiva*.

The central principle of the theory of the origin and development of the universe is *satkarya-vada*. According to it, nothing new comes into being, nor is anything created out of nothing. In creation, it is not the emergence of something new, but the self-differentiation of the same reality. Being alone becomes, and is the cause of the becoming. The one alone becomes the

many, and is the cause of the manifold. In this way, the cause is immanent in the effect, and is non-different from it. The Brahman with *cit-acit* in a state of non-differentiation becomes the Brahman with *cit-acit* in a state of differentiation, with infinity of distinctions in name and form. The Absolute becomes the many by evolving into the world-body, *parinamat*.

According to Ramanuja, the *sadvidya* brings out the non-difference between cause and effect as applied to cosmology. The creative urge of the One to become many is the energizing, dynamic idea of self-revelation. Being alone becomes, and becoming has its meaning only in being. The same substance enters into different states without losing its substantiality. The One enters into the many, and becomes *sat*, the sentient, and *tyat*, the non-sentient. It is only a process of the un-differentiated becoming the differentiated. In the causal as well as the effected state, the same Brahman exists with its modes implicit or explicit. Cause and effect are, therefore, non-different. By knowing the Brahman, the cause, the effect, namely the universe, is also known.

The cosmological problem is the threefold problem of philosophy relating to nature, self and God. It is by the will of Isvara that nature changes and the self progresses. It is by knowing Him as the inner-Self of all beings that all beings are known. The Brahman is thus the ultimate meaning of the universe. This explains the nature of the Brahman as the world ground and goal.

The order of creation as set forth in the Sastra is the evolution of *prakrti*. *Prakrti* is differently conceived as *aksara*, *avidya* and *maya* meaning eternal, obscuring the knowledge of the Brahman and manifest creation, in that order. *Prakrti*, static in its primordial state, energizes, begins to grow and becomes the infinite world. It evolves into *mahat* with the three states of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Mahat* changes into *ahamkara*. From the *ahamkara*, the eleven sense organs or *indriyas* originate. The *indriyas* are

two-fold - *jnanendriyas* and the *karmendriyas*. The *jnanendriyas* enable the self to comprehend sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. The corresponding *karmendriyas* are eye, ear, tongue, nose and skin. *Manas* is the inner sense organ; and *antahkarana*, the sense commune that coordinates sense knowledge, is the sheath of memory. The *indriyas* are neither good nor evil by themselves, and they are very subtle.

*Prakrti* consists of five gross elements - *bhutas* - ether (*akasa*), air (*vayu*), fire (*tejas*), water (*ap*) and earth (*prthvi*). From these gross elements arise *tanmatras* - sound (*sabda*), touch (*sparsa*), colour (*rupa*), savour (*rasa*) and odour (*gandha*) - in successive evolution. From ether springs air, from air fire, from fire water, and from water earth. When *vayu* sustains in the body, it is called vital air and is five-fold - *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana* and *samana*. In this way, the universe is self-differentiation in successive forms of the same *acit* into the twenty-four categories of *prakrti*, *mahat*, *ahankara*, eleven *indriyas* including *manas*, five *bhutas* and five *tanmatras*. As all evolve from one cosmic source, there is continuity of nature.

The universe is composed of the five mixed elements, namely, ether, air, fire, water and earth, and each substance is so called because of the preponderance of one or other elements. The principle underlying its composition is quintuplication, according to *sadvidya*. Quintuplication is what creates particular things with specific names and forms.

The souls are eternal. Even in *pralaya*, they are in a subtle state, devoid of names and forms, and are, therefore, not apart from the Brahman. In *srsti* (creation), the Brahman, as the omnipotent Isvara, bestows on all *jivas* bodies and sense organs suited to their *karma*. He enters into them as their inner Ruler. Each *jiva* or *sariran* has its own *sarira* or *ksetra* composed of *prakrti*, *mahat*, *ahankara* and five elements. The eleven senses are joined to the

*sarira* through *karma*. *Pralaya* and *srsti* form a regular succession of involution and evolution to bring out the rhythmic perfection of the cosmic plan. This view ensures the unity of the universe and its uniformity and stability, while providing for infinite individual variations.

The *sadvidya* admits the inequalities of life of individual *jivas*, but traces them to their *karma*. Parasara puts it thus: 'Isvara is the operative cause only in the creation of the new beings; the material cause is constituted by the *karma* of the *jivas* created.' Isvara, as the moral ruler of the world, dispenses justice according to the nature of the *karma* resulting from the free will of the *jiva*. The Lord makes the soul act having regard to its past *karma*, whether meritorious or non-meritorious. Every person is primarily responsible for his conduct and it is morally unjustifiable to throw the blame on supernatural agencies or the highest Lord. The cosmic system has moral foundation, and Isvara is Isvara only because He is righteous. Divine justice is same to all, and it reigns supreme in the kingdom of moral experience.

The Vedantasutras say that what is called the creation, sustenance and destruction of the world by Isvara is mere sport. The logical and moral ideas of the Brahman as the *upadana* and *nimitta-karana* of the universe are transfigured in the aesthetic idea of *lila*.

A true theory of cosmology has to recognize the reality of nature, self and God by avoiding the extremes of naturalism, personalism and singularism. Nature as *prakrti* or *ksetra* evolves into the world, but is not itself purposive. It serves the purpose of Isvara as a suitable medium for the perfection of *purusa* or *jiva*, an eternal entity distinct from *prakrti*. The evolution of *jiva* is not a mere becoming or happening. It is a self-choice of infinite forms of life as god, man, animal, insect or any other species, till it discovers or recovers itself. Isvara is distinct from both, and is the

immanent ground of the evolutionary process of nature and the transcendent goal of the moral progress of the *jiva*.

The ultimate meaning of cosmology is spiritual and mystic. Ramanuja explains cosmology in terms of the *sarira-saririn* relation. The Brahman, in all Its states, has souls and matter for Its body. When they are subtle, the Brahman is in the causal state. When they are in the gross state, the Brahman is the universe, the effected state. The non-sentient matter is ever changing, sentient souls are liable to suffering, and the Brahman is ever pure and perfect. The Brahman is Narayana with *cit* and *acit* as His *sarira*, and He creates the *nara*-s, implanting immortality in them. *Srsti* is the evolution of the cosmic purpose, and *pralaya* is the involution and reversal of the whole process. These two processes alternate as the waking and sleeping states of the *jiva*.

*Srsti* provides an environment for the evolving self to grow into godliness. On the other hand, *pralaya* is the withdrawal of the instruments of activity when the Lord finds that the self chooses the way of darkness and sin. This way the process repeats till the *jiva* realizes its ultimate destination and returns to the Absolute. The freed self withdraws itself for ever from the twenty-four tattvas of *prakrti* in the same way in which it entered into them and became matter. When the seer sees the brilliant Self, he shakes off *avidya-karma*, realizes his self as the *sarira* of the Brahman, and becomes a *mukta*. Svetaketu realizes that the *Sat* without a second, which differentiates into the universe as its *saririn*, is identical with the Self that is the *saririn* of his own self. The Gita expounds the same principle thus: ‘At the end of many births in the universe, the wise man reaches Me, saying all is Vasudeva’.

The cosmology of Visistadvaita follows from its ontological view of the Brahman as the *saririn* of the universe of *cit* and *acit* by a suitable application of *satkarya-vada*. The *Sat* without a second is undifferentiated in *pralaya*, but differentiates Itself into

the world of *nama-rupa*. The pre-creational stage is a real possibility in which *cit* and *acit* are pre-existent in a subtle but indistinguishable way and not non-existent. In creation, *srsti*, the potential, becomes actual. In both the stages, the Brahman exists with its *prakaras* or modes. The Absolute, according to Ramanuja, is not the Brahman and the world of *cit* and *acit* in the mathematical sense. The Absolute is the Brahman in the cosmos in the metaphysical sense. The three are distinguishable, but not divisible, eternal but not external. The Brahman enters into the world as its immanent cause, but is unaffected by the world process. Therefore, He is transcendental. This view reconciles the pantheistic and theistic views. The process of nature is in the interests of the progress of the self, and both sub-serve the inner purpose of the Brahman to grow into the universe with a view to moulding *muktas*. The chief value of cosmology lies in its insistence on the truth that the ground of the universe is also the subject of religious meditation.

## 8. The Psychology of Jivatman

In the Gita, the *jiva* is described as immutable, eternal and indestructible. It is said not to be a product of the material world, but of a higher 'spiritual' nature. At or after the point of physical death, the *jiva* takes a new physical body depending on *karma*, and the individual desires and necessities of the particular *jiva* in question. More specifically, the *jiva* is the immortal essence of a living being (human, animal, fish or plant etc...) which survives physical death. It has a very similar usage to *atman*. Whereas *atman* refers to the 'cosmic self', the word '*jiva*' is used to denote an individual 'living entity' or 'living being' specifically. The word *jiva* originates from the Sanskrit word *jivás*, with the root *jîv* meaning 'to breathe'.

In ontology, knowledge of the spiritual self - *atman* is essential to Vedantic culture. The psychological study of the *atman* has a unique value and meaning in determining the nature of such culture. The nature of the *atman* is discovered by *yogic* intuition, and not by the method of behaviourism, psycho-analysis or ideational construction. The self is its own evidence and its continued existence is self-positing, and not proved by metaphysical tests. The self abides in its own self. The self is a spiritual entity different from the material changes of the organism, mind-body.

In Visistadvaita, the *atman* or self is a knowing subject, *jnatr*. Visistadvaita defines the self negatively as the *Purusa*, different from the twenty-four categories of *prakrti*. *Purusa* is the twenty-fifth category and is termed the higher *prakrti* on account of its being spiritual. The Gita says that the body is the *ksetra*, while the *atman* is the *ksetrajna*, knower or the field of knowledge. The body is mutable, *asat* and, therefore, perishable, *vinasin*. But the *atman* is immutable, *sat* and, therefore, indestructible, *avinasin*. The *atman* is eternal, *nitya*, and stable, *sasvata*. The *atman* is beyond *gunas*, *nirguna*. It cannot be perceived by the senses,

*avyakta*, nor conceived of, *acintya*. The *atman* cannot logically be proved, *aprameya*. It is only the basis of proof, *pramatr*. It works through the means of knowledge, *pramana* to obtain knowledge, *jnaana*. The nature of the *atman* is thus difficult to know and, therefore, it arouses philosophical wonder, *ascrayavat*. Owing to *avidya-karman*, the *atman* mistakes itself for the *anatman*, is entangled in *samsara* and migrates from body to body. But it is ever without change, pure and eternal. As the *atman* cannot be logically defined in terms of genus and differentia, it can only be defined in terms of experience by direct intuition, *atmanubhava* as the eternal knower or the subject of experience.

The *atman* is self-illuminated, *svayamprakasa*. Its intelligence is both substantive and attributive. While the *atman* exists by and for itself, *pratyak*, its *dharmabhuta-jnaana* exists for another, *parak*, that is the *Atman*. Thus, the *atman* is self-realized and, at the same time, the subject of *jnaana* or *jnaanasraya*. Selfhood is knowledge of itself, but *jnaana* is knowledge about the objects. Selfhood is *dharmijnaana* but *jnaana* as the knowledge about the objects is *dharmabhuta-jnaana*. The two are inseparable.

Self-experience, *atmanubhava* is different from the experiences of the self as the expression of its consciousness. The *jiva* is infinitesimal in its monadic existence, but its attributive *jnaana* can be infinite and all-pervasive like the light of the sun. The self is infinite in its range, though it is smaller than the smallest. The *jiva* perseveres in its unique being, but its consciousness can have a cosmic range and mirror the whole universe. Like light and luminosity, the *atman* and its *jnaana* are logically distinguishable, but physically inseparable. The two are organically related. *Jnaana* is the determining quality of the *atman*, but is also substantive and it is subject to the changes of contraction and expansion. It is eternal and all-pervasive. But, in the empirical sense of *samsara*, it is enveloped by *avidya-karman* and undergoes contraction, *samkoca* and expansion, *vikasa*. *Jnaana* is ever identical with itself, though

its manifestations are liable to change. In the state of salvation, *mukti*, *jnaana* regains its essential state, and is eternal and infinite.

Visistadvaita conjures *dharmi-dharma* relation between the *atman* and its *jnaana*. This concept rescues knowledge from scepticism and solipsism. The denial of the *guna*, *dharma* is the denial of the *gunin* or *dharmin* itself. There can be no quality without the substance possessing it, no experience without an experiencing entity. *Jnaana* functions as a cognitional process of the nature of the logical ego employing the criteria of truth and the *pramanas*, with a view to discriminating between truth and falsity including doubt, *samasya*; wrong opinion, *viparyaya*; illusion, *bhrama*; and false knowledge, *durmati*, by means of discrimination, *viveka*; and seeking final beatitude, *sreyas*.

In the moral situation, the self does not remain an indifferent spectator watching the conflict of motives, and the triumph of the strongest motive. On the other hand, the self identifies itself with the whole process as the doer doing the deal. Freedom is a skill or capacity as well as an activity. Self can become a god or a dog, and no one can destroy its consciousness of freedom and initiative.

Feeling is the essence of the empirical self as the experiment, *bhoktr*. Pleasure-pain is the stuff of feeling and is regarded as its hedonistic tone. Every state of consciousness has a feeling tone which includes organic and bodily feeling, psychic feeling and the feeling caused by the reaction of the subject to the object that is presented to it. There are said to be five meanings of feeling, namely, touch, organic sensation, emotion, purely subjective state and pure affective state like pleasure or pain. When an emotion qualifies a more stable centre, it is called a sentiment. The highest sentiments of the social self are friendship, *maitri*; mercy or benevolence, *daya*; devotion to God, *bhakti*; and self-surrender to God, *prapatthi*.

The *atman* as the material self is imprisoned in its mind-body or gross (*sthula*) and subtle (*sukhma*) *sarira*, and enjoys the pleasures of sense and sensibility. When its desires are rationalized by *viveka*, it rises to a higher level of self-feeling, and enjoys the happiness of self-realization. When it intuits the Lord who is its inner Self, it enjoys eternal bliss.

The three states of consciousness are one continuous context, and are not contradictory. Each state shades off without any leap or gap into other states which are equally real. *Dharmabhuta-jnaana* with its possibility of becoming infinite has a unity and identity of content running through all its varying and vanishing presentations. It is one single affirmation about the *dharmin* and is sustained by its intelligence.

All the states of consciousness mark the transition of *jnaana* from the conscious to the sub-conscious and to the unconscious determined by *karman*. From the ethical standpoint of the *karman*, moral life presupposes the freedom and eternity of the self. The religious consciousness insists on the preservation of the eternal values of the freed-self. When the gross body is dissolved in death, the *jiva* goes to heaven, *svarga* or hell, *naraka*, to enjoy the fruits of its good or evil deeds as the case may be. No *jiva* can escape the consequences of its *karman*. The law of retribution presupposes the immortality of the *jiva*, the existence of Isvara as the dispenser of justice, and the unity of the universe of space-time as the field of activity and the sphere of retribution.

When the merit, *punya* or demerit, *papa* is exhausted by enjoyment in *svarga* or suffering in *naraka*, the *jiva* returns to the earth and reincarnates in a new body determined by its residual *karman*, and begins a fresh career in the new environment. The self has thus freedom to grow into *sattvic* goodness or lapse into *tamasic* wickedness. While the evil *karman* drags the *jiva* down to sorrow, the inner divinity in each *jiva* urges it to choose the way

of blessedness. The *jiva* thus drifts between destiny and divinity and subjects itself to numberless births and deaths, till it decides on *mukti* and becomes a *mumuksu*.

Visistadvaita psychology of *jiva* has a metaphysical basis. It refers to a plurality of eternal and immutable *jivas* having *jnaana* as their essential attribute. The *jiva* is an atomic entity, but its intelligence is infinite, though limited by *karman*. The *jiva* is substance-attribute; it is a *visesya* and *visesana*. It derives its sustainability from the Brahman and is called Its *aprthak-siddha-visesana*, *upadeya* and *amsa*. As the ethical self, the *jiva* has moral freedom but dedicates itself to the service of the Lord, *svamin*. As the aesthetic ego, it is made of beauty imparted by the absolute beauty of the Brahman. The *atman* derives its form and function from the Brahman, depends on His redemptive will, and exists for His aesthetic satisfaction. It is, therefore, His *sarira*. The *jiva* is different from the Brahman in the denotative aspect because of its unique individuality, but one with Him as it connotes Him as His self. This is the paradox of the theory of *prakara* in Visistadvaita. But this theory satisfies the needs of theistic monism, and reconciles monadism and pantheism. This view has the merit of ascribing the evils of life and the irrationalism of the universe to the *avidya*-ridden *jiva*, and purity and perfection to the Brahman. Visistadvaita affirms the fundamental similarity of the intelligence of all the *jivas* and also the Brahman. Thus it promotes spiritual brotherhood and social solidarity.

The Vedantic psychology is founded on its philosophy of religion as expounded in the Vedantasutras. The nature of the *atman* cannot be known apart from that of the *Paramatman* as the two are integrally related as *sarira* and *saririn*, *amsa* and *amsin*. Visistadvaita explains that the *jiva* or finite self is a *prakara* of the *Paramatman* as a logical, ethical and aesthetic ego, and is finally intuited as His *sarira*. The logical relation between the finite self and the Brahman is in the categories of cause and effect, substance

and attribute, and whole and parts. The *jiva* is the effect of the Brahman in the sense that a term connoting the Brahman in the effected or differentiated state is coordinated with another connoting the same in the causal or non-differentiated state.

This view leads to the second concept of the *jiva* as the inseparable attribute, *aprthak-siddha-visesana* of *Sat*, the ultimate substance. The substance is the subject of qualities, and there is connection of content between the Supreme-Self and Its quality, the *jiva*. The *visesana* is not only an eternal differentiation of the Absolute, but also an eternal part, *amsa* of the Brahman, the Whole, the Reality, while the *jiva* is a spark of the brilliant Self. The *jiva* is not merely a mode of the Brahman but is a spiritual monad. The idea that the Brahman is one entity and that the *jiva* is separate is only mathematical, but not metaphysical. This is for the reason that the true Infinite, the Brahman transcends the category of quantity. The *Vibhu* is the *Virat* immanent in the *anu*, the monadic *jiva* as its inner Self, but it exceeds its finite content. Though monadic as a substance, the *jiva* has intelligence which is capable of becoming infinite. The *jiva* is the *upadeya*, *visesana* and *amsa* while the Brahman is the Supreme Source, and the Inner-Self. Visistadvaita thus reconciles the discrepancy between monism and pluralism by its interpretation of the terms causality, substantiality and infinity.

The ethical ego stresses the aspect of transcendence and external relation with Isvara in terms of *sesa* and *sesin*, and *dasa* and *svamin*. A quality is inherent in a substance and a relation is strictly between two substances. The *jiva* is not a *visesana*, but is a self-active personality or *visesa* which is essentially free. Isvara is *Purusottama*, *niyantr*, who wills the true and the good, and whose conation is immediately self-realized. He is absolutely pure, perfect and holy. The *jiva* attains self-sovereignty by subjugating sensibility and egoism, *ahamkara* and dedicating its freedom to the service of Isvara. The self realizes its utter dependence, *sesatva* on Isvara,

its inner Ruler, and its being a means to His satisfaction as *sesa*. *Cit* is conscious of such instrumentality, and is, therefore, called *dasa*. Every deed is consecrated service to Isvara as *kaimkarya*, and the gift of the self is the supreme *kaimkarya* to the Lord who is its real Self and Redeemer.

The aesthetic ego reconciles immanence and transcendence by the concept of the *jiva* as not only the knower, *jnatr*; and the doer, *kartr*; but also as the enjoyer, *bhoktr*. While the logical view promotes intimacy and unity, the ethical view fosters reverence to the Holy. The aesthetic view combines the two by intuiting the Brahman as *Bhuvanandara*, who creates for Himself a beautiful form of His own to attract the self and transmit beauty and bliss to it. The logical, ethical and aesthetic egos are ultimately transfigured into the threefold expression of the *sarira* of the Brahman in terms of *adheyatva*, *vidheyatva* and *sesatva*. The term *saririn* as applied to the *Atman* should satisfy the three conditions of modality, dependence and serviceability. First, as a mode, it derives its being from the Brahman as the very life of its life, *svarupasrita*, and is sustained by Its immanence, *atmaika-prakarata*. Second, it is controlled by Its will, *samkalpasrita*, and absolutely depends on It, *atmaikasrayatva*. Third, the self subsists as a means to realization of the divine purpose, *atmaikaprayojanatva*.

Thus the *jiva* derives its substantiality from the Brahman as the *adhara*, depends on His redemptive will as the *niyantr*, and exists as a means to the satisfaction of the *sesin*. The Brahman as the source, sustenance and satisfaction of the finite self is called its *saririn*. Every term connoting the *sarira* connotes the *saririn*, and the *jiva* also connotes the Brahman, its *saririn*. There is a plurality of *jivas*, each having its own distinct character, although all *jivas* are alike in so far as they have their intelligence for their essential nature.

The Visistadvaita view that the *jiva* is both a monad having an existence of its own and a mode or inseparable attribute of the Brahman draws criticism for inconsistency. A *visistadvaitin* replies to such criticism thus:

1. A thing can be both substance of and an attribute to another substance. For example, the lamp emits light; light here is an attribute of the lamp and, at the same time, is in itself a substance.
2. The experienced object is not always *acit* or *jada*. When X perceives or infers Y while, the latter, though experienced by the former, is himself a thinking or experiencing self.
3. The relationship of *sarira* and *saririn* as between the self and the Brahman adequately brings out the intimacy between the two in spiritual communion. This view also conveys the truth that the *Paramatman* as *saririn* enters into the *jivatman* which is its *sarira* with a view to imparting substantiality, and communicating Its infinite love to the *jiva*.

The existence of plurality of selves is a fact of experience in all its levels. Visistadvaita recognizes not only the plurality of *jivas*, but also the need for moral and spiritual endeavour on the part of every *jiva* ultimately to attain the Brahman.

## 9. Mukti-Mumuksutva

### *Mukti*

The spiritual destiny of a *mumuksu*, according to Visistadvaita, is his attainment of the supreme abode of the Self, *Paramapada*. The ecstasy of union even in the mystic quest is only momentary, and has no security and stability. It is only by attaining *Paramapada* that the *mumuksu* has an integral experience of the Absolute, *paripurna-brahmanubhava* and enjoys eternal bliss.

The ladder to perfection, the *paramapada-sopana*, as described by Vedanta Desika, consists of nine stages, namely, *viveka*, *nirveda*, *virakti*, *bhiti*, *prasadana*, *utkramana*, *arciradi*, *divyadesa-prabhava* and *prapti*.

*Viveka* is the clear philosophic thought of the Brahman as *saririn* and *sesin*. *Nirveda* is the moral feeling of remorse arising from reflection on the sinfulness of sin and the sorrows of merit-demerit. The off-shoot of *nirveda* is *virakti* leading to *vairagya*, renunciation of the hedonistic pleasures. *Bhiti* is the spiritual dread of the hideousness of *samsara*, which awakens the religious consciousness inducing the *mumuksu* to practise *bhakti* and *prapatti*. When *bhakti* and *prapatti* develop into hunger and thirst for God, God grants the *jiva* His grace, *prasadana*. The last four stages deal with the *summum bonum* of spiritual endeavour, *purusartha* and portray, in a pictorial way, the ascent of the redeemed soul, *mukta* to his home in the Absolute. The mystic, *paramaikantin* is practically freed from the fetters of *karman* including *prarabdha-karman*, and *mukti* may be realized immediately or eventually. In any case, he is a *kṛta-kṛtya* who has no more problems to solve, or evil to subdue. At the time of the dissolution of the body, the *mukta* ascends to Vaikunta by the

straight shining path of *arciradi*, and attains intimate union, *sayujya* with the Brahman.

Ramanuja establishes, following the interpretation of the *Sutrakara*, that *arciradi-gati* is the direct way to *mukti*. *Mukti*, according to him, is not only the direct apprehension of the Brahman, but a progressive attainment of *brahmaloka*. In the world of the Brahman, the *Paramapada*, matter shines without mutation and time exists in the form of eternity. ‘The sun does not shine there, nor the moon, nor the stars; by His light everything is lighted.’ ‘The Brahman is before and behind, above and below’. The freed soul gloriously enters into *vaikuntha* which is the heart of *brahmaloka* and its headquarters, reaches the hall of *anandamaya*, bliss and has a direct soul-sight of the Supreme Light, *Paramapada*, with a shining form more luminous than a million suns on the couch, *paryanka*, of which, till then, the *mumuksu* had only inferential and *sastraic* knowledge.

The Brahman, as infinite Beauty, is enthroned on a *paryanka* supported by *dharma*, *jnaana*, *vairagya* and *aisvarya*. That throne is wisdom, *prajna* and the Brahman is the True of the true, *satya*. The released self on seeing the Brahman realizes the unitive consciousness. The infinite of space-time pales into infinitesimal littleness in the light of the Infinite and the eternal glory of *vaikuntha*, which transcends thought. The *brahmavid* enjoys all the perfections of *vaikuntha* such as identity of abode, *salokya*; proximity, *samipyā*; similarity of form, *svarupa*; intimate union, *sayujya*; etc, and is ever immersed in the eternal bliss of the Brahman. *Salokya* leads to *samipyā* and *sarupya*, and is consummated in the bliss of communion, *sayujya*.

The nature of *mukti*, as elucidated in Visistadvaita, as the attainment of the blessedness of *Paramapada*, cannot be described or defined. *Brahmaloka* is the nameless beyond, which cannot be proved by logical thinking or even scriptural knowledge. The

Absolute of ontology is beyond space, *prakrti* and time, *kala*. It is, therefore, formless, *niravayava*; indeterminate, *nirguna*; or eternal, *kalatita*. As *Paramatman*, the Brahman transcends the limits of materialism and spiritualism. Ethical religion is equally helpless in knowing the redemptive will of Isvara as the Creator of creators, and overcoming the dilemma of freewill and determinism. From the religious point of view, He reveals Himself unto him whom He chooses as He is Himself the *upaya*, the *upeya*. In this context, it is difficult to decide between voluntarism and predestination. On the whole, the Visistadvaitic idea of *mukti* transcends the theorizing activity of thought. It cannot be labelled as a form of theism, non-dualism or, for that matter, any ism.

On the other hand, the Upanisads describe the inexpressible experience of the *mukta* by positive predicates. They insist on the fact of intuitive perception of the Brahman by the purified and perfected consciousness, *jnaana*. The *brahmavid* can apprehend the Brahman with the divine eye, comprehend His nature and have an integral experience of the Absolute, *paripurna-brahmanubhava*. He is led from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. Though this experience is alogical and amoral, the Upanisads make it intelligible to the empirical consciousness in terms of cognition, conation and feeling. The Brahman is the All-Self, and by the expansive consciousness of *dharmabhuta-jnaana*, the *mukta* realizes the unitive state. His self-feeling melts away at the sight of the bewitching beauty of the Brahman and his Vedantic thought expires in the ecstasy of the mystic union.

Ramanuja appears to understand by *mukti* the integral experience of the Brahman that has infinite *jnaana*, *ananda* and other perfections. This indeed is the true nature of the *jiva* realized by the destruction of *avidya-karman*. The *jiva* is a *prakara* or *sarira* of the Brahman, and its *jnaana*, which is infinite, has, as its essential nature, the unitive experience of the bliss of the Brahman.

The Chandogya Upanisad explains *mukti* as the self-realization of the *atman* by self-transcendence, and the Sutras bring out its full implication. The serene self attains the Being of its being when it has a soul-sight of the boundless light of the Brahman. Thus it attains its essential and eternal nature. Self-realization is not the attainment of something new, but is the self-manifestation resulting from the cessation of the *avidya-karman*. In *mukti*, the *atman* is free from sin, old age, death, grief, hunger and thirst, and its desire of oneness with the Brahman is at once realized.

*Karman* conditions *jnaana* and creates the bodily self which is subject to contingency, change and sorrow. But in *mukti*, the mortal becomes immortal and the self regains its eternity. While consciousness in the empirical states of waking, dream and sleep is obscured by *avidya*, in the expansive state of the unitive life, it realizes its infinity. While the *atman* is, as it is, changeless, *avikara* and eternal, *nitya*, the limitations and obscurations of its attributive intelligence affect its integrity indirectly. But in the state of self-realization, the self shines in its own effulgence like the cloudless sun. The *atman* itself is a ray of the *Paramjyothi*, Supreme Light, and its luminosity is the revelation of the boundless light, which is the source of the light of the suns and stars, and the serene self itself. Self-realization is thus the unitive knowledge of the *atman* and its self, and is not bare identity.

Ramanuja accepts the concept of *avibhaga* to explain the relation of the *mumuksu* to the Brahman in *mukti*. *Brahmajnaana* is the intuition of the Brahman as the Supreme Self. The *atman* has the Brahman as its inner self and *prakarin*, and the consciousness of the *mukta*, in *mukti*, is revealed in the experience, 'I am the Brahman without any division, *vibhaga*'. This does not mean absolute identity, *svarup-aikya*, but *visista-aikya* in which the self is realized as inseparable mode, *aprthak-siddha-visesana*, and not as total mergence as in identity. The *jiva* abides as an entity different from the Brahman in that, though there is difference

in denotation, there is identity in connotation, as every concept connoting the *prakara* also connotes the *prakarin*. This inseparability, *avinabhava* abolishes the sense of exclusiveness and externality that belongs to the bodily self of egoism, *ahamkara*. But it does not annul the ego consciousness of the *atman*. Rapt in love, the *mukta* is ever drawn by the beauty of the Brahman, and enjoys Its bliss. When the *brahmanized mukta* sheds his body, his self acquires the purity of the Brahman. This concept underlines the truth that the *sarira* depends for its life on the *saririn* and serves as an instrument of His will.

*Avibhaga*, non-division, thus connotes existential difference between the Brahman and the *mukta*, and experienced unity owing to the joy of intimate communion, *sayujya*. It is not the loss of personality. In the mystic sense, the self-feeling is swallowed up in the supra-personal experience of *avibhaga*, that is, the unitive experience of the bliss of the Brahman. This brings out the nature of *brahmarasa* more than coexistence, *salokya*; similarity, *sarupya*; and intimacy, *samipya*. The Visnu-purana says that the *mukta* attains *atmabhava* like magnetized iron, but is not identical with the Brahman. The Gita defines *mukti* as the attainment of equality of attributes with the Brahman.

Though the Brahman imparts Its nature to the *atman* of the *mukta*, and infinitizes its *jnaana*, the *atman* persists in its monadic being with a view to utilizing the freedom gained in *moksa* in service to the Supreme Self. The finite-self lives, moves and has its being in the Brahman as the All-Self, *sarva-saririn*. The *mukta* has the freedom to move in both the worlds – the world of eternity and the world of *samsara*. While the ascent to the world of eternity is an escape from the sorry scheme of *samsara*, the descent of the freed self into the finite world expresses the cosmic freedom of the *mukta*. His all-pervasive consciousness destroys the barriers of space and time. The worlds of *lila* and *nitya* constitute the

world of the Brahman as a whole, and are comprised in the all-inclusive cosmic consciousness.

In Visistadvaita, *mukti* is realization of the meaning of the relation between the *jiva* and Isvara as stated in the Upanisad, ‘Thou art That’. Visistadvaita explains that the self, in *mukti*, surrenders to the Self with total self-effacement, but still retains its identity. In this state, what the self experiences is *kaimkarya-rasa*, not *kaivalya-rasa*. It is the experience of the bliss of the Brahman, the ecstasy of the unitive consciousness that expresses the supreme value of *mukti*. The *mukta* is immersed in the supreme bliss of *brahmanubhava*, without losing his self-being. It is a state of *sayujya* in which the unitive experience of bliss is present without the loss of self-existence. In this state, according to Visistadvaita, the soul-hunger of God and the God-hunger of the soul are satisfied and the separate consciousness of both is swallowed up in the enjoyment of bliss.

*Mukti* is not the cessation of sorrow, but is the positive experience of *ananda*, ineffable and incommunicable. In this *ananda*, the experiences exist, but their feeling of separateness melts away in the irresistibility of ecstasy. In the mystic union, the *mukta* is mad with God and sings His glory and greatness. The bliss of the union is ever fecundative, and it enhances the value of the released state. The bliss of the self-realizedness signifies the self that is realized and its value is eternally conserved. This concept is fully in line with the recorded self-realization of the mystics like Nammalvar, Andal, etc.

Visistadvaita establishes that reality is realizable and is, therefore, the home of eternal values. The Brahman is the Absolute, and finite thought purified by the *sadhanas* can transcend finiteness and intuit the Brahman. The *vedantin* as a philosopher can think God’s thought after Him, and realize His godliness. By knowing

the Brahman as the reason of the universe, the *jnanin* is freed from worldliness and attains the realm of ethical values.

It is only when the soul reaches perfection in *mukti* that perfect satisfaction arises. The universe as *lila-vibhuti* exists not for pleasure, but for moulding the soul into a *mukta*. *Cit* and *acit* are eternally real, and do not admit of degrees of reality. But values admit of levels or degrees. Values have meaning only in relation to the self and the satisfaction of its desires. The values of spiritual life are more lasting than those of the sensuous life in the phenomenal world. But it is only in *mukti* that the *jiva* is perfected and *brahmanized*. The *mukta* is no longer affected by the flux of *prakrti* or tainted by evil, error or ugliness. The values of truth, goodness and beauty then attain their highest degree of perfection. *Mukti* is not merely freedom from ignorance, sin and sorrow, but is also the regaining of *Paramapada*, the realm of eternal values.

Visistadvaita does not agree that values alone survive in the Absolute, and not selves. The freed self is not a vanishing illusion, nor does it merge in the whole like the dew-drop slipping into the shining sea. Its content is no doubt transmuted; but it is not true to say that it contributes to the whole. The offering the freed self makes to the Brahman is self-gift without selfishness. Every value is trans-valued and perfected. The self gains itself by renouncing its empirical and exclusive nature and acquires the colour, *brahmarupa*; flavour, *brahmarasa*; and fragrance, *brahmagandha*. It is immersed in its everlasting and fecundative bliss.

Free of the limitations of *prakrti* and time, it lives in spaceless space and timeless time. It is supra-personal, but not impersonal. In *Paramapada*, the *jiva* attains its infinite consciousness and regains the eternal values. Eternity is not the prolongation of the present life, nor is it personal survival, but is a

state of self-transcendence. In this state, the self renounces the phenomenal activity and realizes its noumenal state.

The world of *Paramapada* is a shining spiritual world, and is made of bliss itself, *aprakrta*, *paramakasa* and *anandaloka*. It is the realm of *suddhatattva* made of peculiar kind of matter that is immutable. It is *ajada*, and is self-luminous like *jnaana*, and exists for the enjoyment of the *atman*. Space and time do not disappear in the Absolute, but are transfigured and contribute to the infinite riches of divine experience. *Paramapada* transcends the world of *prakrti*, *tamas*, and has more resplendence than that of a million suns and stars. In its purity and perfection, it is beyond the obscuration of *avidya*. It is a noumenal realm which can be neither perceived by the senses nor conceived by the intellect. It cannot adequately be described by *sastra*, and can only be intuited in the form of eternity by the *mukta*. Only the *mukta* can experience the bliss of *anandaloka*. He, too, cannot explain it as it is beyond the conception of mind.

Ramanuja explains in his Vaikuntha-gadya the nature of experience of bliss in the *anandaloka*. The Brahman has His own transcendental nature, *svarupa*; infinity of perfections, *guna*; and supreme, unsurpassed form of beauty, *rupa*; which are alogical, amoral and supra-mystical. Metaphysics deals with what can be known, and that is the world of the Brahman. Ethics deals with what should be known and that is service, *kaimkarya*. Religion deals with what we may hope for and that is the attainment of the immortality of bliss. In this way, metaphysical knowledge ripens into virtue and virtue is crowned with happiness. The supreme end of life is the enjoyment of the bliss of the Brahman. Logic and ethics have their consummation in aesthetics and mysticism, and the crowning glory of mystic experience is to revel in the beauty of *anandaloka*. Visistadvaita is the only philosophy of religion that identifies existence and value, and defines the Brahman as

real Reality, *satyasya satyam*, which *brahmanizes* the *mukta* and imparts its beauty and bliss to him.

*Paramapada* is the realm of self-luminous *suddha-sattva*, free from the evolutionary, *parinamic* modifications of *prakrti* and the influence of its three *gunas*. *Paramapada* is beyond *prakrti* and its twenty-three successive emanations. It is, therefore, not conditioned by the five elements that compose the cosmic matter. It is also not affected by the psycho-physical changes of the mind-body of the migrating *jiva*. In *Paramapada*, Visistadvaita claims, matter exists, without modification, in a non-material, *aprakrta* form. But its value in *mukti* is more important than its eternal existence. It shines in its own light as *ajada*, but exists as a medium and means for the enjoyment of the *mukta*. Beauty consists of form and matter and can never be attribute-less, *nirguna* or formless, *niravayava*. The Brahman, who is *nirguna* and *niravayava*, wills to be and becomes the Beautiful by creating a body of His own which has divine symmetry, softness, fragrance, colour and eternal youthfulness with a view to imparting His beauty and bliss to the *mukta*. The radiant form of the Brahman is set forth in matchless lyrics in the Bhagavata, the Vaikuntha-gadya and the Paramapada-sopana, the chief scriptures of Visistadvaita. The *jnaana* of the *mukta* is all-pervasive. If he desires the enjoyment of his cosmic freedom with the body, the desire is immediately realized, and he attunes himself to the will of Isvara as in the waking consciousness. The freedom of the *mukta* is no longer obscured by *avidya-karman*, and he enjoys eternal self-rule and universal sovereignty.

According to Visistadvaita, time does not vanish in the Absolute. Time is the succession of events, and not a series of exclusive moments. Nothing is static, and everything is in a state of ceaseless becoming. Worlds are dissolved periodically at the end of each epoch, *kalpa*. The destruction and withdrawal of the cosmic process is itself conditioned by time, *kala*. Even the cosmic will of Isvara is self-conditioned by *kala*.

In the exposition of time, Visistadvaita affirms the eternal as immanent in the temporal and transcending it. The world of splendour, *lila-vibhuti* which exists for the sport of the Lord, is the play of the eternal in the temporal; and the eternal splendour of *Paramapada*, *nitya-vibhuti* is time as eternity. The *lila-vibhuti* is the realm of causal necessity, *karman* without any contingency. It is the sphere of soul-making and is not a realm of relativity rooted in *avidya*. The finite self feels its finitude, and seeks freedom from the empirical life by attaining immortality. As the eternal alone gives meaning to the temporal process and is its final consummation, the reality of the progressive attainment of eternal life is assured.

Moral and spiritual endeavour is a *sadhana* for such transcendence. Truth is the passage of the self from the *lila-vibhuti* to the *nitya-vibhuti*. In *lila-vibhuti*, time is finite and affected by *gunas*. *Nitya-vibhuti* is infinite and beyond space-time. *Samsara* is determined by time series, but *mukti* determines the time series by the self gaining mastery over it. The Lord is the link of love between the two realms. In the attainment of eternal life, the self transcends the transient dimensions. The *mukta* views everything in the form of eternity; and his bliss of *sayujya* is ever creative, and is an eternal now. No human experience can ever explain the ecstasy of eternal life.

Visistadvaita states that *brahmanubhava* differs from *mukta* to *mukta*, though the Brahman is the *sat* without a second. The *mukta* is free to realize the Infinite in infinite ways, and this function is determined by his own will. While the nature of the meditation, *upasana* varies from *mumukshu* to *mumukshu*, the goal of intuition or realization of the Brahman remains the same. Every *upasana* has its own adequacy and efficacy in securing the stability of *mukti*. Every specific experience of *mukti* is immediate experience of the Brahman. The *mumukshu* may be a *jnanin*, a devotee or one of works or of *yoga*, and he attains the realization of the Brahman in

*mukti*. The *mumuksu* may meditate on some single quality of the Brahman such as *satyatva*, *jnatrtva*, *anantatva*, *apahatapapmatva*, *ananda*, according to his inclination. According to scriptures, even the eternal seers have sought and enjoyed one aspect of the divine nature. The bliss of the Brahman is irresistible and every Vedantic philosophy seeks *ananda* as the supreme end and aim of life.

## ***Mumuksutva***

A *mumuksu* is a spiritual seeker after the Brahman. He is a metaphysician who enquires into the nature of ultimate reality and truth at the religious level.

Visistadvaita, as a philosophy of religion, is founded on the fundamental Vedantic truth that the knower of the Brahman attains the highest, *brahmavid apnoti param*. The enquiry into the Brahman, *brahmajijnasa* is governed by the spiritual end of attaining immortality, *na ca punar avartate*. The knowledge of the Brahman as the ground of existence obtained by employing the *pramanas* enables the self to determine the practical methods of attaining liberation, *mukti* from the hazards of birth and death.

Ontology is to encompass teleology and value philosophy if it is to be a logical account of reality. The Brahman, as the ultimate *tattva*, is spiritually realizable as the supreme *purusartha* by moral and spiritual discipline, the *hita*. The word *vedana* in the Upanisads connotes not merely the philosophical apprehension of the Brahman, but also the spiritual attempt at realization in which *jnaana* deepens into meditation, *upasana* on the Brahman. The attainment of God is a supreme and ultimate good which includes the moral and spiritual effort to realize it.

The Brahman is eternally self-realized and perfect, but the *jiva* in its empirical state forgets its divine destiny. The finite self has its source and sustenance in the Brahman, but it forgets its divineness, wanders in the wilderness of *samsara*, and finally regains the paradise, *Paramapada*. *Brahmajnaana* is a spiritual ascent of the enlightened self to its home in the Absolute. The supreme end of the *mumuksu* is thus the realization of the Brahman, the consummation of moral discipline.

The *atman* is essentially free and eternal, and has its being in the *Paramatman* as its inner Self. Visistadvaita states that, somehow, owing to the influence of *avidya-karman*, the *atman* falsely identifies itself with *prakrti* and images itself to be the mode of matter. As like attracts like, the *prakrti*-ridden *purusa* acts as if it was a body-self, drawn by the objects of sense, and thus becomes the slave of sensibility. It is then caught up in *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, and pleasure and pain. *Avidya* creates the confusion of *dehatma-bhrama*, *abhimana* owing to failure to distinguish between the self and the body. *Abhimana* generates lust, *kama*. *Kama* leads to hatred if the desire for the objects of sense is frustrated. The effect of *avidya-karman* is conserved in the mind-body as the infinite causal change of *karman* leading to the possibility of future births and deaths.

The *jiva* ascends to *svarga* by its meritorious *karman*, or to *naraka* by its demerits in action. The pleasures of *svarga* or the pains of *naraka* follow the law of retribution with mathematical precision. With exhaustion of merit and demerit of the *karman*, the *jiva* enters into the body of another living being – human, sub-human and celestial – and subjects itself to the hazards of metempsychosis. Visistadvaita accepts the reality of the cosmic order and the solidarity of society in all its levels in the three layered universe of the sub-human, human and celestial orders.

If the *jiva* seeks the infinite bliss of the Brahman, to become a *mumuksu*, the first requisite is self-renouncement, *virakti*, freedom from the desires of the terrestrial and celestial pleasures. The idea of self-renouncement as a spiritual ideal implies the abandonment of the lower self of sensibility in favour of the higher self in the state of *kaivalya* or the aloneness of the *atman*. The *mumuksu* regards God as a centre and source of his life, and gets totally absorbed in Him. Renunciation of *ahamkara* and the realization of the self go together. *Virakti*, essential to spiritual life, destroys the sensualism and the self-complacency of the worldly life. A

*mumuksu* is one who realizes that the desire for the pleasures of sense, *visayaraga* is insignificant, *alpa* and evanescent, *astira*, but the love of God, *bhagavad-raga* leads to infinite and eternal bliss.

The ontology of Vedanta establishes that the Brahman is the ground of existence as well as the supreme good of life, *purusartha*. The good that which all rational beings aim as of supreme value is four-fold - *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*. What is right or *dharma* cannot be separated from the goodness of the end, and moral good has no value apart from the supreme good. In this context, the highest end of life is neither the acquisition of wealth and power, nor the performance of moral duty or *dharma*, nor the satisfaction of desires, but the realization of the Brahman which is the highest good, the supreme duty and the infinite bliss.

When virtue and knowledge go together, bliss is inseparable from them. *Brahma-jnaana*, *brahma-prayatna* and *brahmananda* are not really separate. The *mumuksu* who enquires into the nature of the Brahman as the supreme *Sat* or Reality also desires to realize the Brahman as the highest end of moral and aesthetic life. What is apprehended as the most valid truth is also attained as the most valuable end or good.

Visistadvaita recognizes the value of spiritual progress and the philosophical truth of the self-realized nature of the Brahman. The *mumuksu* endowed with *jnaana* and *vairagya* seeks the Brahman because he is aware that the Brahman is his self. He lives in moral discipline brought about by the performance of *duty*, *karma-yoga*; spiritual illumination, *jnaana-yoga*; and loving meditation on the Brahman, *bhakti-yoga*. The *mumuksu* with his *sadhana* transcends a philosopher who only speculates on the nature of Reality. The *mumuksu*, seeker after immortal bliss, realizes that there is no bliss in anything finite, but in the infinite alone. The Brahman alone is free from evil, sin and suffering, and the *mumuksu*

seeks to return to the Brahman, his real self to regain the eternal values of divine life.

## 10. Ways to Salvation

### *Karma-yoga*

*Karman* is different from *karma-yoga* in that *karman* is the datum of the moral life, while *karma-yoga* is its discipline. The study of *karman* is the subject matter of the psychology of the moral self, while *karma-yoga* deals with the moral determination of the ideal involved in conduct.

Cessation from *karman* in thought, word or deed is a psychological impossibility. As voluntary action, it is purposive and involves the idea of end, which is called desire, *kama*. *Kama* is either externally originated, *sparsaja* or centrally initiated, *sankalpaja*. In either case, it is the desire for the objects of sense. Owing to the conservation of moral values, the effect of every *karman* leaves its impress on mind-body known as *vasana*. The mind-body acts on the empirical self resulting in the infinite chain of causality of *karman*. *Karman* is a matter of moral faith, the result of beginning-less ignorance, *anadi-avidya*.

The *jiva* is impelled by its propensity of *avidya-karman* to seek the pleasures of sensibility, and plunges into *samsara*. But the infinite within the *jiva* urges it to emerge into higher stages. The *karma-yoga* strikes a middle path between activism and asceticism, favouring renunciation in action as opposed to renunciation of action as ideal of conduct. This leads to the ethics of *niskama-karma*, action without desire for the fruit thereof.

According to the Gita metaphysics of morals, while every living being does its *karman* according to a purpose, man alone has the conception of *karman* owing to his moral consciousness, including reason and will. In a moral situation arising from a conflict of desires, he can exercise his discrimination and arrive at a decision. By his *buddhi*, he can distinguish between the *ksetrajna*

and *ksetra*. As the *atman*, he knows that he is *aparinama*, free from the mutations of matter, *prakrti*. He realizes that he is the subject conscious of himself, *pramatr*. He also knows that the *atman* is different from the world of nature. He is the immortal self, *avinasin*, distinct from *prakrti*, which is subject to a cycle of births and deaths.

*Buddhi* develops into *vyavasayatmika buddhi*, the disciplined thought of the *mumuksu*, which frees *karman* from the distractions of sensual desire, *visaya-kama* and fosters the aim of desire for release, *moksa-kama*.

*Niskama-karman*, as a negative concept, excludes *raga* and *dvesa*, and also the objective ends of utility, namely, gain and loss, *labha* and *alabha*. *Niskama-karman* is the performance of action without being impelled by the ends of pleasure, *sukha* and avoidance of pain, *duhkkah*; or securing success, *labha* or avoiding failure, *alabha*. *Niskama-karman* is good in itself without qualification, and has its own intrinsic value. It is performance of duty for the sake of duty irrespective of consequences.

None in this world is free from *karman*. The whole cosmic order is a moral order sustained by the law of *karman*. The law of *karman* rules the cosmic order whether its causality is conditioned or free. The *jiva*, imprisoned by the chain of *avidya-karman* because of its identification with *prakrti*, can never escape the wheel of *karman* as long as it is in the world of *samsara*. Inaction, *akarman* is a psychological impossibility.

Ethically, it is possible for the self to dissociate itself from the *guna*-ridden *karman* as it is essentially the *atman*, and not the bodily-self moulded on the pattern of *prakrti*. The moral philosopher is aware that *karman* is due to action and reaction of *gunas* because of the conjunction of the *atman* with *prakrti*, but he seeks to renounce the egocentric mentality, *ahamkara*. *Karma-*

*yoga* thus consists in abandoning not the deed, but the doer-consciousness. It is the process of self-realization by self-renouncement. The essential requisite of *karma-yoga* is giving up the false notion of doer-ship. *Karma-yoga* combines rational insight and active endeavour. It is a synthesis of scientific theory and moral practice.

*Niskama-karman* is an imperative of duty of the form 'do your duty without caring for the consequences'. The law of *karman* is founded on, and fulfilled in, the divine idea of justice and righteousness. In a true ethical religion, omnipotence and justice go together. The imperative of *niskama-karman* is a divine command, which has an absolute claim on our obedience. Conversely, the violation of the law is the repudiation of the divine will and the refusal to listen to the voice of God in the inner moral consciousness of mankind.

The kind of duty one is to do may be determined by one's temperament and station in life. But the nature or inner motive of *karman* is the same in all, that is, duty for duty's sake, irrespective of inclination within and utility without. In ethical religion, it is truer to say that Isvara wills the good than to say that what He wills is good. The ethics of *niskama-karman* is that man must choose the way of goodness so that he may grow into the goodness of God. The highest moral good is in doing a duty that ought to be done, and not as a coercive law that must be followed.

*Tapas*, *dana* and *yajna* are classical illustrations of *niskama-karman*. *Tapas* is a duty to the self, and is the practice of self-purification in thought, word and deed. It connotes the virtues of truthfulness, *ahimsa* and patience. *Dana*, as a duty to others, is the exercise of benevolence to the needy without any ego. It is a gift to the needy without any publicity. *Yajna*, as a duty to gods, is offering sacrifices to the *devas*, who help in maintaining the cosmic order, without looking to any boons. A *karma-yogin* attains moral

autonomy. Disinterested duty fosters reverence for the moral law, and arouses the feeling of dignity and sublimity. The moral idea of equanimity, *samatva* brings out the superiority of soul power over brute force.

The true moral evil is not the existence of the self in the world of embedded life, but the falsity and falsehood of the *ahamkara*-ridden ego that pretends to be the *atman*, but is not really so. Matter is not in itself evil, but the materialistic view fosters evil-mindedness. The body is a living temple of God, *brahmapuri*, and evil is in its wrongful possession and enjoyment. The true *karma-yogin* sheds the egoistic feeling of *ahamkara* and the commercial view of *karman*. In him, the moral self ascends to the higher stage of *jnaana-yoga*. *Niskama-karman* is not an end in itself but is a means to *mukti* through self purification and self-knowledge. It helps in transition from self-renouncement to self-knowledge. *Karma-yoga* is thus rationalized *karman*, and is a direct path to self-realization, *atmavalokana*. It is generally the preferred path in view of its ease and naturalness.

## ***Jnaana-yoga***

In *jnaana-yoga*, the knowledge of the *atman* is mediate, but in *atmavalokana*, it is immediate. The best evidence of the proof of the *atman* is in direct experience. *Atmavalokana* presupposes the speculative knowledge about the self as a real possibility. There is a gradual transition from the metaphysics of morals of *niskama-karman* to the spiritual philosophy of *atma-kama*. It is a transition from the moral ideal of what a man ought to do to the spiritual enquiry of what a man ought to be. It is the development of moral 'ought' into a deeper 'is'. While doing a good is an external duty, being good is an inner virtue. The *mumukshu* who desires to know the *atman* is the one to strive to ascend to spirituality. He ought to do his duty till he realizes the *atman* and becomes the awakened spirit. In the intuition of the *atman*, all activity is absorbed. When the end is reached, there is no longer any need for endeavour. While moral life is a pursuit of truth, spiritual life connotes its possession.

The spiritual seeker is not a slave of the causality of *karman* or *avidya*. To the *mumukshu*, spiritual seeker, *manas* is the free cause of either *samsara* or *mukti*, salvation. Though his *prarabdha-karman* is a consequence of his *vasanas*, he is not a necessary agent or instrument of *karman*, as he has the will to win freedom or lose it. The *jiva*, as a spiritual entity, is the real self, and its desire for self-knowledge is the real process of self-revelation, involving the conquest of *karman* and the removal of *avidya*. Spiritual freedom is thus different from the determinism of *karman* and the illusionism of *avidya*; it is freedom from the joint influence of *avidya-karman*. It is the aim of *yoga – karma-yoga* or *jnaana-yoga* to help the *atman* to free itself from the confusions of *avidya* and the causal determinations of *karman*, and shine in its own splendour.

When the *atman* falsely identifies itself with *prakrti* in a *jiva*, the *jiva* is termed *dehatman*, embodied soul. In this event, the moral self is the *karma-yogin* who does his duty in a disinterested way. While the metaphysic of morals analyses the nature of *niskama-karman*, the philosophy of the spirit, *atman* expounds the rationale of *atma-valokana*. It is only by means of self-purification that the ideal of self-perfection can be achieved.

The *atman* shines as an eternal substance, subject or self. The world of souls is a spiritual realm transcending conceptual knowledge. It is the self that enquires into nature and God, and, by relinquishing its materialistic associations, seeks to know itself and its inner self. Visistadvaita lays special stress on the philosophy of the self, and insists on *atma-darsana*, vision of the self as a prelude to the philosophy of religion.

The goal of *jnaana-yoga* is realization of the inner-self, *pratyagatman*. This is possible by a rigorous moral and spiritual discipline. The first requisite in this *yogic* process is securing spiritual equanimity, *samatva*. The spiritual seeker secures spiritual equanimity by renouncement of economic goods. The *dvandas* like success and failure, pleasure and pain, and likes and dislikes lead to the dilemma of the divided life. *Samatva* includes the virtues of indifference, endurance and detachment in that order. Introspective life implies indifference to the utilitarian ideas of success and failure. Both pain and pleasure are to be treated with equal indifference. The spiritual seeker is to overcome *raga* and *dvesa* by dissociation of the self from the fleshly cravings.

The *sadhana* for *jnaana-yoga*, *jnaana-nista* starts with the reflective analysis of the ideas of the inner-self, *pratyagatman* and the embodied self, *dehatman*, and the progression in the spiritual endeavour. The body is not the *atman*, though physical well-being is essential to spirituality. *Sattvic* habits are only means to self-knowledge. Spiritual endeavour is both a negative method of self-

renouncement, *vairagya* and a positive way of introversion, *abhyasa*. Self-renouncement is the method of self-induction. This method removes *ahamkara*. This is not to be confused with self-mutilation or self-extinction. The renunciation of the lower self and the realization of the higher self go together. The more spiritual a thing is, the more real it is, and the *mumuksu* seeks to unveil *ajnaana*, and enters the domain of *atmajnaana* as the witness of the psychic changes.

Practice of introversion, *abhyasa* consists in withdrawing the mind, *manas* from the *vasanas*, and the distractions of *prakrti*, and focusing on the inner-self. Focusing on inner-self, consciousness is free from the sensuous plane and concentrates on the inner-self. This leads to inner quiet. In this state the mental modes of *prakrti*, *vrittis* are destroyed, and not the self. The *atman* is enriched in the process of *abhyasa*, repeated practice.

The *mumuksu* desirous of *atma-jnaana* is no longer allured by wealth or bound by social ties, as his consciousness is withdrawn from external activities and turned inward. The *yogin* focuses his mind, *citta* on the *atman*, subduing its fickle minded-nature. The intuition of the *atman* is his only endeavour and end.

By way of choice, a *mumuksu* may take to *yogasadhana* as a way of realization. *Yogasadhana* consists of eight stages of *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. *Yama* is the moral practice of truthfulness, non-violence, contentment, continence, poverty and the will to receive no favours or benefits. Continence is the sublimation of sex-energy, *retas* into spiritual energy, *ojas*. *Niyama* is the discipline of the mind-body resulting in self-purification, study, reflection, austerity and the attunement of the mind to the will of God. *Asana* is the physical control of the body to overcome its *tamasic* languor and *rajasic* restlessness. *Pranayama* is the control of the vital breath, *prana* by balancing the respiratory function of *prana* and *apana* to attain

psychic control. These four stages are steps to *yogic* introversion, and are not *yoga* in the strict sense of the word.

*Pratyahara* is the arresting of the outgoing senses, and attuning them to the inner sense. *Dharana* is the focusing of *manas* on an object, by withdrawing it from the distractions of sense and the tumult of dispositions, *vasanas*. When the self-centred *citta* passes into the state of ceaseless introversion, *dharana* deepens into *dhyana*. The habit of the philosophic reflection spiritualizes the mind by removing the distractions of *manas*, the restlessness of *citta* and the egocentric conceit of *ahamkara*. Thought ceases when it reflects on itself, but is not a case of suppression or extinction.

*Dhyana* has its consummation in *samadhi*, when the contemplation of the *atman* becomes a direct intuition. In *samadhi*, consciousness ascends from co-native and reflective levels, and returns to its own pure state of aloneness, and the self-effulgent joy of *sahasrara*.

The process of *yoga* is thus a philosophic and spiritual discipline, and not mere psychic control or occultism. The *yogic* endeavour of the spiritual seeker to ascend is consummated in the intuition of the *atman*, self-realization with the *karma*-complex entirely burning out in the fire of spirituality.

The Vedantic ideal of society is not that of an aggregate of individuals or of an organism, but that of a spiritual community of *jivas* providing an opportunity for the gradual realization of each self as an *atman* and not as a thing. The ultimate end of this ideal is self-realization as the goal of individual and social life. In such a spiritual community, the external goods have value only in so far as they promote the goods of the soul or spiritual welfare. The spiritual scheme of society consists in doing our duty to the cosmos, and not in the assertion of exclusive rights. The ideal of the *yajnas*

and *yagas* is thus based on the consciousness of giving back to the universe what has been received from it. Though a man's duty is determined psychologically by his station in life, *svadharma*, his ethical motive is derived from the universal ideal of righteousness. The final spiritual ideal of the *jiva*, according to Visistadvaita, is the realization of the inner worth of each self, the similarity of the attributive consciousness of all *jivas* and the solidarity of life in all the levels of the three-storeyed universe.

The experience of the spiritual unity of all *jivas* is expounded in the Gita. Looking alike on all things, the *yogin* who has intuited the *atman* sees the same self in all the *jivas* owing to the similarity of their spiritual intelligence, *dharmabhuta-jnaana*. It is only the bodily feeling caused by *karman* that creates the separatist consciousness and generates *raga-dvesa*. The seer who has soul-sight, *atma-dristi* and sweet reasonableness, *vinaya* intuits the same *atman* in a dog as in a god. In a higher stage, the *yogin* has a glimpse of *Paramatman*, the Supreme Self, as the pervading identity in all *jivas*. He sees Him in all beings and all beings in Him. In the next higher stage, the seer acquires *atma-jnaana* exhibiting universal sympathy in which he realizes the kinship of all *jivas*, and regards the joys and sorrows of all as his own.

The spiritual philosophy of the *atman* refers to self-realization, *atmavalokana* which is different from the religion of God-realization attained by *bhakti* and *prapatti*. The seeker who prefers the joy of *kaivalya* to the bliss of divine life is called *kevala*. To him, seeking God is only a means to realizing the self. He seeks spiritual freedom arising from dissociation from *prakrti*, also dependence on the cosmic ruler. The *kevala* is a contemplative devoting himself to *yogic* introversion by withdrawing his mind from the external tendencies. The goal of the *kevala* is to intuit his self by abandoning the ideas of 'I' and 'mine' regain his eternal nature and thus attain freedom from birth and death, the cycle of *samsara*. The state of *kaivalya* thus attained may be called the

flight of 'the alone to the Alone' in which the *atman* enjoys inner quiet and is self-satisfied.

Visistadvaitic philosophers regard the value and destiny of *kevala* differently. One school maintains that *kaivalya* is not on the road to *mukti*, but *mukti* itself, but does not encompass *Paramapada*. The *kevala* has no hope of intuiting God and enjoying the bliss of communion. Another school maintains that the *kevala* is on the path to perfection and will eventually reach the divine goal. The *kevala* frees himself from the shackles of *prakrti*, transforms into the *jnanin* and attains the bliss of immortal communion with Him. Gita says that the *jnanin* and the *kevala* return no more to the world of *samsara*. The spiritual consciousness of the *kevala* has its fruition only in religious consciousness.

The religious consciousness consists in shifting the centre of reference from the *atman* to *Paramatman*. The knowledge of the finite self has its religious fulfillment in the integral experience of the Infinite, which is his ground and goal. *Kaivalya* may be on the plane of *mukti* or on the path to it, but the satisfaction of *atma-jnaana* has no value when it is contrasted with the bliss of the Brahman.

## ***Bhakti-yoga***

*Karma-yoga*, *jnaana-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* are different stages in the progressive realization of *mukti*. *Karma-yoga* is the path of disinterested duty with the knowledge of the distinction between the eternal *atman* and the empirical ego of *prakrti*, and the gradual renunciation of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. *Jnaana-yoga* is the process of self-realization with the consummation of moral and spiritual culture. *Karma-yoga* and *jnaana-yoga* are means to *mukti* only through *bhakti-yoga*. *Bhakti-yoga* is the direct pathway to perfection, as it leads to the very heart of the religious consciousness. Each *yoga* is a stepping stone to the higher stage.

Ramanuja upholds the view that the spiritual authority of the Upanisads, the Brahmasutras and the Gita is an integral unity, and the validity of the system depends on its coherence with the whole Sastra and its spirit. As a systematic and self-contained philosophy of religion, Visistadvaita sees no difference between the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion. It reconciles the claims of logic with the needs of religious feeling. The Brahman is one, and is the goal of the different *upanasas*.

Visistadvaita follows the logic of religious intuition to state that the Brahman of the Upanisads and the Sutras, the Vasudeva of the Gita, the Bhagavan of *Pancaratra* and the *arcaa* of the Alvars connote the same Supreme Self. It insists on *bhakti-yoga* as the direct means of knowing the Brahman. It meets the demands of metaphysics, and satisfies the supreme call of love by its theory of *bhaktirupapanna-jnaana* or *jnaana* turned into *bhakti*.

The practice of *bhakti* presupposes certain disciplines including the sublimation of feeling, and the training of the intellect and the will. These disciplines are known in Visistadvaita as the *sadhana-saptaka* in contrast to the *sadhana-catustya*, the four-fold discipline of Advaita. The Advaitic *sadhana* consists of the triple

discipline of thought, feeling and will, defined as *viveka*, *vairagya* and the disciplines of *sama*, *dama* and the rest. Advaitic *sadhana* is not a progressive attainment, as its idea of *mukti* is the cessation of *avidya*. For *advaitins*, *brahma-jnaana* is immediate as the Brahman is ever self-realized. But Ramanuja's Sribhasya reveals the contrast: 'May my *buddhi* or *jnaana* blossom into *bhakti*, devotion to the Brahman or Srinivasa whose nature is revealed in the Upanisads as Self, that, out of the *lila* or sport of love, creates, sustains and reabsorbs the whole *bhuvana*, universe with a view to saving the *jivas* that seek His love'. The Brahman as the *saririn* of the *jiva* is the *prapaka* as well as the *prapya*, the endeavour as well as the end. The scheme of *sadhana-saptaka* is helpful in the building up of *bhakti*.

The seven *sadhanas* to *upasana* or *bhakti*, in Visistadvaita, are *viveka*, *vimoka*, *abhyasa*, *kriya*, *kalyana*, *anavasada* and *anuddharsa*. *Viveka* is the purification of the body, *kaya-siddhi* by means of *sattvic* food. The body is *brahmapuri*, living temple of God. Bodily purity is necessary to purity of mind, *sattva-suddhi* which leads to spiritual concentration, *dhruva-smrti*. *Vimoka* is freedom from the cycle of *kama* and *krodha*. This mental detachment is necessary to the meditation on the Brahman. *Abhyasa* arises from bodily purity and mental detachment. It is continuous practice of the presence of the indwelling Self so that the mind is *brahmanized*, *tadbhava-bhavita*. The practice of such introversion does not free the *upasaka* from his moral obligation to others. As such, the next *sadhana* is *kriya*, the performance of the five-fold duties according to one's ability, as such moral obligations develop into meditation on God. The *upasaka* seeks to know the Brahman by Vedic recitation, sacrifice, benevolence and *tapas*. The five-fold duties constituting *kriya* are to sub-human species, human society, the *guru*, the forefathers and the gods, in discharge of obligations for his psycho-physical existence. The *upasaka* needs the performance of duties as a means of purification.

While *kriya* is overt action, duty, *kalyana* is the practice of virtue, the inner side of duty. It consists of *satya*, truthfulness; *arjava*, integrity or purity of thought, word and deed; *daya*, compassion; *dana*, benevolence; and *ahimsa*, non-violence. The next *sadhana* is *anavasada*, freedom from despair owing to disappointment, remembrance of past sorrows, and horrible imaginings. *Anudharasa* is the absence of exaltation and is a mean between the extremes of excessive joy, *ati-samtosa* and absence of joy, *asamtosa*. Good and evil actions are the result of *karman*, and *niskama-karman* is duty emptied of the subjective inclinations of the objective ideas of utility. The aim of the seven *sadhanas* is the practice of moral and spiritual disciplines by the harmonious development of thought, feeling and will, which are partial expressions of the attributive consciousness of the meditating devotee.

Equipped with these disciplines, *sadhanas*, the *upasaka* enters on the life of meditation and cultivates the love of God. *Upasana* is a divine command like the performance of *dharma*. While the Vedic 'ought' is of the form 'do your duty without caring for the consequences', the Vedantic 'ought' is of the form 'know the deity that is your self'. Of the three Upanisadic injunctions of *sravana*, hearing; *manana*, reflection; and *nidhidhyasana*, meditation, the first two lead to the third, and *dhyana* is the only divine command. *Sravana* and *manana* have no value until they deepen into *dhyana*. It is by absolute devotion to God, and not by Vedic study, meritorious work or austerity that the Brahman is realized. The knowledge of the Brahman is not academic or speculative, but is a spiritual intuition which transcends logical thinking. *Dhyana*, meditation alone deepens into *upasana*, devotion or worship.

*Upasana* is the practice of the presence of the *atman*, and admits of the three stages of firm meditation, *dhruvanusmrti*; repetition, *asakrdavrtti*; and the vision of union, *darsana-*

*samanakarata*. Every cognition of the Brahman is recognition of the inner-self of the *upasaka*, and is a recollection of the *a priori* idea of God as an archetype. *Dhyana* or *ekagra-cittata* is a continuous process of mental concentration on the nature and the form of the Brahman, which is practised daily till death or dissolution of the body. *Dhyana*, as *upasana*, is a ceaseless remembrance of the Lord, which is likened to the uninterrupted flow of oil. It is the process of focusing the mind on the Brahman in a proper environment. For this reason, the spiritual seeker is advised to choose proper place and time and to adopt proper sitting posture, most conducive to *dhyana*.

The eight stages of *yoga* are specially designed to draw the mind from its outgoing tendency, to subdue its *vasanas* and to centre it in *samadhi*. *Astanga-yoga*, the eight-fold *yoga*, is thus essential to *brahmopasana*. As bondage is a descent to the world of *samsara*, *mukti* is the process of retracing the steps and returning to the spiritual home in God, and the whole scheme of *upasana* is governed by this central concept. *Upasana* deepens into *bhakti*, when recollection acquires by practice the clearness and distinctness of a direct perception of the beatific form of the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Self. This *upasana* promotes spiritual intimacy and the unitive consciousness.

The *jiva*, as materialist or sensualist, seeks the goods of life. But when he turns into a worshipper of God, he prays to Him for the boons of life, and they are bestowed on him. The *jiva* then ascends to a higher stage when he prays to Isvara to the boon of *atmavalokana*; then he intuits his *atman*. The *mumukshu* does not bargain with God for pleasures of this life or of *kaivalya*, but meditates on Him as his real self, and utilizes his spiritual freedom for the service of the *sesin*. The *karma-yogin* who does his duty in a disinterested way, becomes a *jnaana-yogin*, who prefers self-knowledge to activity. He is transformed into a devotee to whom *karman* is neither *niskama* nor *akama*, but is *kaimkarya*,

consecrated service. The offerings to the *devas* like Agni, Indra and Vayu are really dedicated to the *Devadeva*, God of gods, who is their inner ruler. Thus every Vedic work is really the Vedantic worship of the supreme *sesin*. Isvara, the bestower of boons according to *karman*, transforms Himself into the redeemer of *moksa*. Thus the fruit of *upasana* is not earned by merit alone, but by the redemptive mercy of the saviour, *raksaka*. The Lord accepts the devotion of the *mumukshu* flowing from *ahimsa*, kindness, patience, truth, self-control, *tapas*, inwardness and *jnaana*, and redeems *mukti* to the seeker.

When *brahmajijnasa*, the philosophic enquiry into the Brahman develops into *brahmopasana*, the ceaseless meditation on His nature, self-effort is transfigured into self-giving and the saving faith in the grace of God. *Moksa* is not attained by mere moral and spiritual discipline. The practice of *niskama-karman* and ceaseless *dhyana* make the *mumukshu* to rely on divine grace as the only means to *mukti*. In *Visistadaita*, *mukti* is liberation through the saving grace of God and it arises by the conquest of *avidya* and *karman* by the knowledge developed into *bhakti*, devotion, called *bhaktirupapanna-jnaana*. When the idea of God as *sesin* is clear and distinct and the religious emotion is disciplined, *upasana* has its fruition in *bhakti*.

*Bhakti* is meditation on the Brahman in love, *priti*. It is absolute devotion to Bhagavan as the life of our life, and is love for love's sake. The true *bhakta* is true *jnanin*, as he knows that Bhagavan alone is the source and satisfaction of life. So he lives, and has his being in the divine love. The Lord of Love seeks the *jnanin*, and sees him as his very life and self. Thus the *jiva* who, as the *prakara* of the Brahman, seeks the *prakarin*, is now sought by the Brahman and loved as His *prakarin*. The true *jnanin* does not meditate on himself, *svasvarupa-anusamdhana*. He meditates on the Self of his self, and thus he transforms himself into a *bhakta* who loves Bhagavan as his very life and rejects *mukti* itself, if it is

devoid of divine life. To him, the *muktipada* of the Sutras is transfigured into a *bhaktipada*.

The essentials of *bhakti* are constituted by the ideas of absoluteness, reciprocity and un-conditionality. The supreme value of *bhakti* is the accessibility of the Lord to His *bhakta*, and adaptability to his devotional needs. The Brahman, the transcendental one, is overpowered by His compassion, *daya* and enters into the heart of humanity, *jivaloka* and incarnates in any form to satisfy the needs of love and *bhakti*. The ideas of *antaryamin* and *avatara* are not the phenomenalized forms of the Brahman, but are the manifestation of divine love. The true joy of *bhakti* is in the building up by the *jiva* of a ladder, *sopana* from the earth to *Paramapada*, the eternal abode, and the descent of the Brahman from *Paramapada* to *Ksirabdhi* and from *Ksirabdhi* to the realms of immanence and incarnation.

Love ignores inequality of status and function. While Isvara tries to shed His Isvaratva to become one with the *jiva*, the beloved, the *bhakta* sheds his *avidya* and *karman*, and communes with the Lord. *Bhakti* is for the sake of *bhakti* and has its fruition in absolute self-surrender to Bhagavan as the means, *upaya* and end, *upeya*.

The Gita affords spiritual insight into the nature of the Brahman or Bhagavan as Sri Krsna, who is the supreme *tattva*, truth; the real *hita*, means; and the *purusartha*, aim of human effort. According to the Gita-samgraha of Yamunacarya, the Gita consists of three *satkas*, sections of six chapters each, which throw light on the path from sensuality to spirituality and from spirituality to *bhakti*. The first *satka* defines the nature of *karma-yoga* and *jnaana-yoga* as the limbs of *atmavalokana*, intuition of the *atman* as a means to *bhakti-yoga*. The second *satka* extols *bhakti* as the supreme means to *mukti*. The last *satka* sums up the whole truth, and insists on absolute self-surrender to the Lord as the only way of redemption.

When meditation, *upasana* deepens into innate and intense love, *preman*, *bhakti* becomes its own end marked by fidelity and fervour, and is called *paramaikantya*. The building of *bhakti* through *karma-yoga* and *jnaana-yoga* develops into *paramaikanta-priti*, definitely determined love to Bhagavan as the *adhara*, *niyantr* and *sesin*. The *paramaikantin* knows, feels and acts with the conviction that Bhagavan is both the means and the end, the *prapaka* and the *prapya*. As the *adheya*, the *bhakta* realizes his inseparability from *Paramatman* like the radiance of the sun, and lives only in the love of God. He feels that the Brahman is absolute bliss, and renounces the pleasures of wealth, *aisvarya* and the happiness of *kaivalya*. He realizes that he exists for the satisfaction of the *sesin*. *Bhakti* increases with the intensity of self-renouncement, *vairagya*. Every *karman* by thought, word and deed is transfigured into *kaimkarya*, worship of Bhagavan as He is Himself the ultimate doer and the deed.

The *bhakta* recognizes Bhagavan as his only Lord, and serves His will, as such service is the only goal of religious experience. Such service constitutes the highest joy of life, *rasa*. It is the self that primarily experiences bliss, *ananda* and not its body, *sarira*. All delights of life belong not to the *jiva*, but to the *jiva-saririn*, the Supreme Self who lives within the self. *Pararthy* is unconditioned self-surrender to the will of God, the only *sesin*. The *paramaikantin* thus lives and has his being in *bhakti*. *Aisvarya* or *kaivalya* has no charms for him. Even *mukti* has no value if it is devoid of *bhakti*. *Samsara* with uninterrupted *bhakti* has itself the value of *apavarga* or *moksa*. Vedanta Desika's preference of *varada-bhakti* here and now to the bliss of *vaikunta* that is beyond, is a typical Vaisnavite experience. This has practically more value than *jivanmukti*.

Another feature of *paramaikantya* is the intense love of Bhagavan to the *bhakta* whom He regards as His *prakarin* or *saririn*. Such *bhakta* is extolled as *mahatma* who intuitively Him

everywhere as Vasudeva, and is sustained by Him as his *adhara* and *sesin*. *Bhakti* as service to God is consummated only in the ideal of service to godly persons and to all *jivas*, and is the supreme end of *paramaikantya*.

For a true *bhakta*, his devotion is controlled by the single idea of attaining *mukti*. When *bhakti-yoga* becomes a means to *moksa*, it is called *para-bhakti*. This *bhakti* is awakened by the knowledge of the Sastras, purified by *karman* and sanctified by *jnaana*. When it develops into a thirst for direct intuition of Bhagavan, it is called *para-jnaana*. Love of God leads to continuous and deep longing for God, and unquenchable spiritual thirst. Then *para-bhakti* becomes *paramabhakti*. The *bhakta* at this stage is not satisfied by mere visions, voices and auditions which are only intimations of immortality. But he eagerly and restlessly seeks the stability of eternal bliss. The *bhakta* longs to see the beautiful form of Bhagavan with the eye of the soul, and hear the music of love with the spiritual ear. The *bhakta* eagerly seeks at this stage for union and communion with the Self in the innermost of his heart. The *bhakta* does not desire the gifts of God like *aisvarya* and *kaivalya*, but seeks the Giver Himself. By renouncing his egoism, he seeks to attain the Brahman who is all in all. When the *bhakta* seeks God, God also seeks him, and they are finally united in the realm of *mukti*.

*Bhakti* is not merely the act of pleasing God by external worship, but is an inner spiritual attitude enriched by the eight virtues, *atmagunas*. The *atmagunas* are purity, *sauca*; patience, *ksanti*; absence of jealousy, *anasuya*; absence of depression, *anayasa*; absence of covetousness, *asprha*; strength of mind, *akarpanya*; good deeds, kind words and noble thoughts, *mangala*; and love to all beings, *sarvabhutesu daya*. When *bhakti* deepens into *parama-bhakti* or *ananya-bhakti*, absolute devotion, it becomes a deep yearning for God. God is also seized with soul-

hunger and yearns for communion with such *bhakta*. God and the *bhakta* are thus united together forever in love.

## *Prapatti-yoga*

*Prapatti* is devotion and self surrender to God as *Radha-Krsna*. This method of attaining salvation, known as *prapatti sadhana*, contains elements of all the other means, and is most importantly, available to all. Men, women, all classes and castes (or non-castes) are permitted to seek liberation through this *sadhana*. It is referred to as *sadhana (apara) bhakti* - devotion through regulations. This in turn leads to *para-bhakti* - the highest devotion characterized by *madhurya-rasa*, the sweet emotions of devotion experienced by those perfected in *sadhana bhakti*. This is in the nature of *yoga*.

The Upanisads prescribe *prapatti* and *bhakti* for the *mumuksu* leading to the grace of God, *brahma-prasada*, as the prerequisite for *mukti*. In the systematic exposition of the *vidyas*, the Vedantasutras, according to Surtaprakasika, the classic gloss of Sribhasya, insist on the unity of all *brahmavidyas*. The intention of the Sutrakara is to include *nyasa-vidya* or *prapatti-yoga* among the important means to *moksa*. The spiritual experience of the Tamil seers, Alvars is epitomized in the *nyasa* of Nammalvar, considered the super *prapanna* of Srivaisnavism.

Although *bhakti* is a desirable means to *mukti*, it is not easily practised owing to its arduousness. *Prapatti* preserves the essentials of *bhakti*, but dispenses with its predisposing causes or conditions. They can only be contingent. It omits the non-essentials like the need for ceaseless practice. It is thus a direct and independent means to *moksa*.

The only requisite for *prapatti* on the part of the *mumuksu* is absolute confidence in the saving grace of the *raksaka*. It is not the possession of merit that is the operative cause of grace, *daya*, but the sense of one's unworthiness and the sinfulness of sin. The Lord is the only way and goal to the *mumuksu*, and *prapatti* is the

act of self-surrender to His grace. It implies an intimate relation between the self-gift of the *mumuksu* and the flow of divine mercy, *daya*,

Redemption is a justification by faith, *mahavisvasa* and not by works. It is not won by merit as the result of continuous process. It is the essence of *prapatti* that the Lord of grace seeks the *prapanna*, and draws him to Himself. The act has a summary effect, as it destroys *prarabdha-karman*, or *karman* that has begun to operate. The supreme merit of *prapatti* lies in the universality of its appeal to all castes and classes, the guarantee of salvation to all *jivas* who cannot follow the arduous path of *bhakti*. *Prapatti* has an intrinsic and independent value as means, *upaya* and the naturalness in securing immediate effect, *sarvadhikaratva*, *sukarata*, *sakrtatavyata* and *avilamba-phalatva*.

In terms of *tattva*, *hita* and *purusartha*, according to Vedanta Desika, the inner meaning of *prapatti* is stated in the Gita-Upanisad, in three sacred truths, *rahasya-traya*. The three sacred truths are said to be *mula-mantra*, *dvaya-mantra* and *carama-sloka*. The first one states in a nutshell, the second makes the meaning more explicit, and the third elaborates it further.

The *pranava AUM* in the *mula-mantra* sums up wisdom in the sacred sound, and is the supreme *mantra* of the *nyasa-vidya*. The letter A connotes *Paramatman* as the source of all things, ideas and words, the twenty-sixth *tattva* which is the truth of all things and also the bottom-line of language. The letter U denotes Sri in the dual sense of Sriyah-pati. The letter M refers to the *jiva*, the supported, *adheya* and the dependent of Sriyah-pati, *sesa*. The *nyasa-vidya* condemns self-conceit and self-love, and affirms the truth of the soul's utter dependence on God, *paratantrya*. It signifies the self-oblation of the *jiva* to *Paramatman* who is its self. The *mula-mantra* is an expansion of the *pranava*, and it equates the

Brahman with Narayana. It explains the means of *moksa* as self-gift, *atma-nivedana* to the *sesin*.

The term Narayana in the *mula-mantra* is *Yogarudha*, significant and singular. *Yogarudha* is one without a second, not in the mathematical but in the metaphysical sense. As *akara*, Narayana, *Paramatman* is immanent in all beings as their life. He does not lose His transcendental eminence. He redeems all *jivas* from their evil career, *sarva-raksaka*. He is the ground of all existence and the giver of all good. *Nara* refers to the universe of *cit* and *acit* of which Narayana is the pervading Self. Narayana is immanent in the *nara*, and is also the goal, *ayana* of *nara*. The middle world *namaha* of the *mantra* prescribes the abandonment of all egoism, *ahamkara*, and *saranagati* as the chief *hita* or *upaya*. It also connotes the truth that God is the only goal of life. Thus the *mula-mantra*, as a whole, and in each of its parts, proclaims that Narayana alone is the source of all existence, the goal of all experience and the means of realizing that goal. He is the saviour of all *jivas*, and all actions should be dedicated to the *sesin* who is the real actor. The highest offering of a *jiva* is self-gift to the *sesin* to whom the self belongs by divine right.

The *mumuksu*, as a philosopher-devotee, trains the intellect in all its eight aspects, and offers the eight flowers of *bhakti* to Bhagavan. Intellect, *buddhi* is disciplined in eight ways namely quick grasp of Vedantic truth, *grahana*; retention in the mind, *dharana*; reproduction, *smarana*; lucid exposition to others, *pratipadana*; inferring the unknown from the known, *uha*; apperception and application in new contexts, *apoha*; discrimination, *vijnaana*; and the knowledge of basic principles, *tattva-jnaana*. The eight flowers of devotion to be offered to the Lord are the avoidance of harm to others, *ahimsa*; control of the senses, *indriya-nigraha*; benevolence to all beings, *sarvabhuta-daya*; forgiveness, *ksama*; knowledge, *jnaana*; austerity, *tapas*; meditation, *dhyana*; and truthfulness, *satya*.

The second sacred truth *dvaya* has pre-eminence over other *mantras*. It brings out the full implications of the supreme truth, *tattva* as Sriman Narayana and Sri. Its first part states that Narayana is not only the source and centre of the universe, *Jagatpati*, but is also the Lord of Love, *Sriyahpati*, and that Sri resides in the heart of Narayana to redeem the self, the *jiva* from its sinfulness. The dual form of the Godhead signifies the Fatherhood and the Motherhood of God designed to inspire the hope of universal salvation. The *jiva*, realizing its utter unworthiness, casts itself on the mercy of the Lord which is spontaneously showered on it. *Prapatti* as an act of self-surrender presupposes the shedding of egoism, and also implies responsiveness to the operation of grace.

The second part of the truth *dvaya* deals with *prapti*, and the *prapanna* realizes that his self-feeling is swept away by the downpour of divine mercy, leading him to live by religion. It states that divine justice is not only tempered by compassion, *daya*, but is dominated by it. The word Sri has six meanings in the religion of redemption of which the most relevant is the idea of Her converting Isvara as Ruler into Saviour, *saranya* by Her timely intercession and mediation on behalf of the repentant sinner. In the sphere of the religion of redemption, mercy, *daya* dominates over retributive justice, *dandadharatva*, and transforms the love of law into the law of love.

Sri is *svamini* to the *jiva* and as mediator, *purusakara*, she mediates on behalf of the sinner and is eternal link of love between the Saviour and the seeker after pardon. The words *prapadye* and *namah* in the *dvaya-mantra* insist on the need for renouncing egoism, *svarupa-samarpana* and the sense of self-responsibility, *bhara-samarpana* on the ground that the Lord and Sri are the endeavour, *upaya* and the end, *upeya*, and for performing *kaimkarya* for the satisfaction of the *sesin*.

The *saranagati* of Nammalvar is the pattern of *prapatti* set by a super-*prapanna*. It reveals the organic relation between the Saviour, *saranya* and the soul that seeks refuge in Him, *saranagata*, in terms of *saranagati*. Sri (Lakshmi) is indistinguishable from the Lord like the fragrance from the flower. The two, Isvara and Sri, are one ontologically, but different functionally owing to the redemptive needs of the *jiva*. In the interests of redemption, Sri becomes the Isvari of Isvara, and changes His law of *karman* into the rule of *krpa*. Isvara overpowered by compassion, *daya* and affection, *vatsalya* renounces His supreme greatness, *paratva*, and incarnates as Srinivasa of unsurpassable beauty and love. He is the only refuge and strength, *saranya* of the *jiva*. Alvar as *saranagata* seeks refuge at His feet with the intercession of Sri as mediator, *purusakara*, as *saranagati* or *prapatti* is self-surrender at the feet of Srinivasa with the conviction that He is the only *upaya* and *upeya*.

The religion of *saranagati* is enshrined in the *carama-sloka*, final teaching of the Lord in the Gitopanisad. This is considered the supreme secret, *rahasyatama*. Its knowledge is intended to remove the sorrows of life, and is to afford the stability of salvation. In the philosophy of religion, the Brahman is the Infinite beyond the world, the Holy that exacts reverence and the Immanent that brings out mystic intimacy. The conception of the same Brahman as the Redeemer brings to light the qualities of *saulabhya*, *vatsalya* and *karuna* which are indispensable in a redeemer.

Every *karman* presupposes five factors of which the real operative factor is the redemptive will of God working through the freedom of the *jiva*. This is the basis of the concept of *niskama-karman* by the *jiva*, while meditating on the Brahman. The teaching of Lord Krsna ‘renounce all *dharmas* and take refuge in me’ is the essence of the *prapatti-yoga*. This divine imperative implies the freedom of the *jiva* to follow it. The freedom of the self is dependent on Isvara, *isvaradhina* and it is fulfilled only when it is attuned to

the will of the *raksaka*. Even the will to serve the Lord by self-effacement is only the gift of His grace.

The consummation of *karman* is service, *kaimkarya* consecrated to the *saranya*. The Lord is ultimately the endeavour and the end, the *prapya* and the *prapaka*, and the *upaya* and the *upeya*. The *sadhyopaya* is the act of self-surrender, *saranam-vraja* to the will of the *raksaka* who is the inner ruler. The *siddhopaya* is the Lord Himself, *mam-ekam*. Such *saranagati* is the most efficacious means to *moksa* and the removal of suffering. The Lord reveals Himself to the *prapanna*, who seeks Him as his absolute refuge.

The *carama-sloka* explicitly prescribes *saranagati* as the means to be adopted by the *mumuksu* incapable of *bhakti-yoga*. It explicitly promises the one following it, release from the entire accumulated load of sins, and secure him absolute service to the Lord in *Paramapada*. It is the call of the Redeemer to the whole of humanity: ‘Come unto me, all ye who are heavily laden, abandoning your egoism, and I shall give you eternal life and Myself’. The sinner seeks God and is saved, and God seeks the sinner and is satisfied. The unique value of the *carama-sloka* is in its universal appeal to all sinners to seek refuge in Him, and be saved.

The scheme of *prapatti* is elaborated in its six parts, *angas* known as *anukulya-samkalpa*, *pratikulya-varjana*, *mahavisvasa*, *karpanya*, *goptrva-varana* and *atma-niksepa*.

*Anukulya-samkalpa* furnishes the *sattvic* motive to follow the will of the *sesin*. When the human will is emptied of egoism, *ahamkara*, it is divinely enriched and attuned to the redemptive purpose of the *raksaka*. It also connotes the will of the *mumuksu* to serve all *jivas*, *sarvabhutanukulya*.

*Pratikulya-varjana* is the negative way of stating the same truth, and consists in the renunciation of what is repugnant to the Lord.

*Mahavisvasa* is absolute faith in the saving grace of God as the universal *raksaka*. It is absolute confidence in *prapatti* as guaranteeing God.

*Karpanya* expresses the feeling of incapacity to follow the prescribed path of *karman*, *jnaana* and *bhakti*. The sense of utter helplessness creates this feeling of humility.

*Goptrva-varana* is the act of seeking the *daya* of the Lord as the only hope for *moksa*.

*Atma-niksepa* consists in self-oblation to the *sesin* with the conviction that such self-surrender is itself a gift of God's grace.

The religion of *saranagati* dispels the skepticism of the moral consciousness. The fears of spiritual fall are dispelled by the assurance that *krpa* reigns in the realm of religion and ousts the evils of *avidya-karman*, and that no sin is so sinful as to exhaust the redemptive grace of God. *Mahavisvasa* is the distinct knowledge of the omnipotence of *daya* and is, therefore, the central and ruling motive of *prapatti-yoga*. The other conditions follow from this spiritual conviction and exalt the levels of conation, feeling and cognition. *Prapatti* is thus the way of divine *daya* and is the descent of *krpa* into the realm of *karman*. It is illumined faith in the saving grace of God as both the *upaya* and the *upeya*. The motive also determines the nature of the end. He who seeks Bhagavan attains Bhagavan. The *jnanin* seeks God as his *saririn* and offers himself to Him. God, in turn, seeks the *jnanin* as His *saririn* and guarantees *mukti* to him.

*Prapatti*, as the religion of *atma-niksepa*, is also considered under the aspects of renouncement of hedonism, *phala-samarpana*; moralism, *bhara-samarpana*; and egoism, *svarupa-samarpana*. Of the three, *phala-samarpana* or *phala-tyaga* is the abandonment of the hedonistic motive that self-satisfaction or happiness is the supreme end of *prapatti*. The true follower of *prapatti* knows that, as an absolute dependent, he subsists in the *sesin* and exists for His satisfaction, and so gives up every form of egoistic or selfish satisfaction. True *sesatva* is realized when the *sesa* knows that he is nothing, has nothing and does nothing. He thus renounces the egoistic feelings of 'I', *kartrva*; 'my', *mamata*; and 'mine', *svartha*. The verbs 'to be' and 'to have' agree with the subject egoism, *ahamkara*, but not with *prapatti*. Even the consciousness of religious individualism arising from the joy of freedom, *atmaraksa* savours of selfishness and has, therefore, to be abandoned.

The second aspect *bhara-samarpana* is the renunciation of the sense of responsibility involved in the saving act. Redemption, *atmaraksa* comes from the *raksaka* who is Himself the end, *sadhya* and the means, *sadhana*, and not from the will of *prapanna* owing to his impotence to follow the ordained path. *Prapatti* removes the heaviness of heart owing to the sense of duty and effort, and to the burden of sin. *Prapatti* requires only a living faith in the saving power of *daya*. By casting himself on *daya*, the *prapanna* becomes fearless, *nirbhaya*.

The third aspect *svarupa-samarpana* is the elimination of *ahamkara* and also the gift of the self, *atman* to God who is its real owner or Self. The *jiva* lives not as the *jiva* as such, but as the *saririn* or *sesin* that lives in it. The term *aham* is the self that has its being and worth only in the *saririn*. Therefore, *svarupa-samarpana* consists in giving back the self to its owner.

All these forms of *sattvika* service are deduced from religious experience consisting in the life of God in the love of

man. This experience marks a radical change from the ego-centric view of *svasvamitva* to the Krsna-centric view of *paratantrya* summed up in the truth *sarvam krsnarpanam astu*. This means that everything belongs to Krsna, and is offered to Krsna.

A *karika* of Vedanta Desika summarizes the Visistadvaitic meaning of *prapatti* thus:

*Svamin svasesam svavasam svabharatvena nirbharam!  
Svadattasvadhya svartham svasmin nyasyasi mamsvayam!*

The word *svartha* denotes *phala-samarpana* signifying that the *sesa* exists for the satisfaction of the *sesin* and that the only end of *atma-samarpana* is the realization of His will as the only will. The words *svabharatvena nirbhayam* signify *bhara-samarpana*, that is, the idea that *atmaraksa* is the concern of the *saranya* and not of the *saranagata*. The word *svaseva* connotes that self-oblation is the main motive for *prapatti*. The *karika* thus expounds the Visistadvaitic idea that the *atman* has self-consciousness, *jnatrtva*; freedom, *kartrtva*; and feeling, *bhoktrrtva*; but the *jiva* as the *sarira* of *Paramatman* has its triple function of knowing, willing and feeling fulfilled organically in the life of the *saririn*.

*Prapatti* is thus the religious conclusion of the philosophy of the *sarira-saririn* relation. It affirms that the *saririn* is Himself the *upaya* and the *upeya*. The terms *svartha*, *svadatta* and *svayam nyasyasi* proclaim the truth that *atma-samarpana* is self-donation to the *para-sesin* who is the giver and the gift, the end and the endeavour. The theory of justification by faith, *vyaja* as developed by Vedanta Desika illuminates the meaning of *prapatti-yoga* and its ultimate relation to the saving grace of the *saranya*.

The seeker after *prapatti* has spiritual freedom to serve the Lord and become an instrument in the divine scheme. His will is

divinely determined, *paradhina*, and not self-determined, *svadhina*. *Prapatti-yoga* is a free act of absolute self-surrender to the *raksaka* without any utilitarian considerations. It is justification by faith. Merit has ethical meaning, but *daya* is a divine quality and is, therefore, amoral. *Daya* as the amoral is the fulfillment of the moral, but not hostile to it. The self seeks God's grace and strives to deserve it, and the grace of God is his.

The Sutrakara affirms the truth that if grace, *krpa* is not considered rooted in righteousness, arbitrariness and cruelty have to be attributed to the divine nature. The forgiveness of the *raksaka* presupposes the quality of forgivableness in the *jiva*, and a change of heart. The gift of *daya* may be unreserved, but should not be undeserved. The theory of *vyaja* reconciles the claims of human endeavour and divine *daya*. An infinitesimal effort by the *jiva* may lead to infinite mercy by the *raksaka*. *Vyaja* results from the feeling of one's moral and spiritual littleness. This should, however, be genuine and not a mere show of penitence to serve as an excuse for divine intervention. The act of forgiveness presupposes change of heart and this is qualitative in character. Contrition alone opens the flood gates of *krpa*, and it is more in spirit than in letter. The words *saranam vraja* in the *carama-sloka* of the Gita emphasize the fact that the grace needs an occasion, *vraja* to reveal itself. *Daya*, *krpa* cannot take root in the soil of hard-heartedness, dissimulation, hostility or aesthetic skepticism.

Srivaishnavism extols Ramayana as a text book of practical religion *par excellence*. It regards it as *saranagati-veda*. The acceptance by Rama of Vibhishana's surrender to Him, *abhayapradana* is considered a Upanisad.

The central theme of Ramayana is the redemption of the *jivas* by self-surrender to the Lord. It is the epic exposition of the metaphysical, *tattva*; moral, *hita*; and religious aspects, *purusartha* of Vedanta. The supreme truth, *para-tattva* is the transcendental

Brahman of the Upanisads that incarnates into humanity from time to time as the saviour of all beings, *sarva-saranya*. *Saranagati* is the universal means of salvation and is, therefore, the greatest good, *paramahita*; the supreme end, *kaimkarya* or service to Him and to all *jivas*.

The main theme of all the six *kandas* of Ramayana is the divine assurance of forgiveness to all who seek refuge at the feet of God, whether they are human, sub-human or celestial *jivas* including demons that are ever hostile to the cosmic redemptive purpose of Isvara.

Ramayana records in yuddhakanda thus: ‘.....None that seeks me as Saviour will ever be given up by me. Him shall I succor and save from all his enemies. I can never give up such a person. No one who seeks protection shall ever be forsaken. This is the law of love approved by all good men.’ The universal Saviour, *sarvaloka-saranya*, the inner-self of all *jivas*, frees the *jiva* from the fears of *samsara* and gives him eternal life and joy. The Ramayana is, therefore, extolled as the shrine of *saranagati* or the scripture of self-surrender, inspiring everyone with the hope of everlasting life and joy.

*Prapatti-sastra* defines *daya* as the soul of Bhagavan Himself, as it is the source, sustenance and satisfaction of the divine nature. *Daya* dominates the creative urge of Isvara and is the underlying motive even in destruction. Creation, therefore, does not really travail in pain, but is conceived in love. *Daya* dwells forever as the inner ruler of the self, and enters into the heart of incarnation. It is the source of all redemption which is not restricted by the distinctions of birth and status. It has universality of appeal, and extends to the *jivas* in the sub-human bodies. *Daya* is unaware of distinction, election and elimination. It runs counter to the doctrine of the Judgment Day when the good are saved and the wicked are smitten. In Srivaisnavism, redemptive love overpowers

justice. ‘Love works no ill to anyone. Love is kind and never fails. It bears all things and believes all things. It is never provoked and takes no account of evil.’ In essence, it is *nirhetuka-daya*.

## 11. The Mysticism of Visistadvaita

Mysticism is not magic, mystery-mongering or *siddhi*-seeking. It is different from occultism and spiritualism. The true mystic rejects the values of supernatural powers and *yoga siddhis*, as he seeks only God. Visions and voices, phantasms, auditions, automatisms, etc may simulate spiritual experience, but they do not lead to God. Rather they lead away from God.

Mysticism is a genuine experience of God which illumines the intellect, purifies the will and exalts the feeling. The intuitive insight of the mystic is immediate and ineffable. God is intuited, not inferred. He can be contacted directly, though He cannot be categorized.

The *mumuksu*, as a mystic, has a natural craving for the Brahman. He longs for love, *bhakti*, not for *mukti* or freedom from the sorrows of *samsara* alone. He craves for the immediate experience of God in this very life. For him, the proof of existence of the Brahman is His immediate experience, the soul-sight of the Self, and reveling in His love. The mystic delights in communion with God, and not in the surrender of will or in the negation of thought. The *mumuksu* has no use for soulless ritualism and dry dialectics.

When love generated in *bhakti* and *prapatti* becomes a longing, the *bhakta* or *prapanna* craves for God and pines away. The soul-hunger of God gets very intense, and the *prakarin* becomes a *prakara* longing for communion with the *jiva* as His very self, *atman*. The relation between the two is changed from the logical, the ethical, the aesthetic and the religious into the mystic love between the lover and the beloved. The mystic *anubhava* of the Brahman arising is supra-rational and is completion of the different realms of knowledge gained in sense perception, science

and philosophy. Visistadvaita emphasizes that mysticism reaches the heart of love, and feels directly its inner pulsations.

Mystic experience is not mere feeling or thought, but an integral experience including the elements of sense, and transcending their limitations. When the seeker subdues the emotions in the light of reason, emotion and intellect become one. Love is for love's sake, and it knows no fear and seeks no favour. God is the Lord of love, and the *mumuksu* is totally filled with love; the lover and the beloved are united. The bliss of such union is not the result of emotionalism and is entirely free of sensuality and sin. It transcends philosophic thinking as its state is beyond mind. Intuition, *tattva-darsana* is the consummation and transcendence of the logical intellect, *tarka-drsti*. The mystic experience of the Brahman is full, perfect and free from the limitations of intellectualism and is, therefore, a-logical.

The mystic hungers and thirsts for God, feels the life of God in the depths of his being and is absorbed in ecstasy. He surrenders himself totally to the Absolute. The self dies to live, and it is deified by contacting God, and entering into eternity. The mystic is always aware that he is only an instrument of the Divine Will and the basis of his activity is shifted to God as the All-Self, *krtsnavit*; and Cosmic Actor, *krtsnakrt*. By attuning to the will of God and thus becoming one with Him, the mystic transcends individualism and the moral distinctions of merit and demerit.

The life of the mystic is supra-moral in the sense that it is the crown and completion of all moral life. The chief quality of God is to transmit His godliness to His other, and make him perfect. Saintliness and unrighteousness can never coexist. The personal worth of the mystic is enhanced by self-effacement and self-gift. Devoid of ego, the *atman* of the mystic sheds its exclusive feeling and realizes the unitive consciousness. The mystic reaches the heights of moral and spiritual consciousness and sees all beings in

God and God in all beings. The mystic no longer seeks the good, but becomes goodness itself.

Thus the amoral is the fulfillment of moral life and not its negation. Visistadvaita does not encourage the method of self-extinction ending in the stir-less rest of *nirvana*, but insists on spiritual activism, and the fullness and freedom of deified consciousness. Spirituality is perfected in service, and mystics like Prahlada and Nammalvar work ceaselessly for the welfare of fellow beings till their end.

To the mystic, the *tattva* is the Brahman, the Beautiful; the *hita* is *prema*; and the realization of the bliss of the Brahman is the *purusartha*. In mystic philosophy, both the Brahman and the mystic are the essential elements of love, and the dualism between the two is overcome by the attainment of unitive consciousness. To the mystic, Reality is realization itself.

Mysticism, according to Visistadvaita, transforms the monistic view of Isvara as the arch-illusionist into that of elusive enchanter of souls, the cunning and thievish Lord of love who steals away the hearts of devotees, *jara-cora-sikhamani*, and ravishes them out of all their feeling of fleshliness. He is the cunning artist who allures the self by His beauty, transfigures its lusts of the flesh into holy love, and by a strange alchemy makes it His own.

The recorded divine experience of Nammalvar is a classic case of unparalleled mystic experience. Pining for God, the Alvar gets a sudden glimpse of God, and feels a strange joy sweeping over him. It is but a glimpse, a mental vision or trance which is physically imperceptible. It lacks sensory vividness and substantiality. Unsatisfied, the Alvar yearns for the aesthetic enjoyment of his outer senses. He longs for physical contact with the Divine Beauty. He realizes that his vision is only a sensory

image resulting from intense mono-ideistic love, *manobhava*. He swings back to the mood of depression and relapses once again into passiveness and emptiness.

Once again he reproaches his beloved, the Brahman, but does not feel any love, and rebukes Him for His callousness and cruelty. Yet his love overflows his inner being and his spiritual cry assumes cosmic dimensions. The thought of oscillation between earth and beyond is deeply distressing to him, though earthly life with God is preferable to Vaikuntha after life. The Alvar is caught up in the dilemma of devotion. Love yearns for physical communion here and now and longs, at the same time, for transcendental life. The former is eagerly desired but not desirable on account of its impermanence, sensuous setting and content. The latter is desirable but is not actually desired on account of its remoteness of time and space. Mystic love is tossed between the spiritual longing for release and the divine dalliance in the *lila* of love. At one time, overpowered by the sense of forlornness, the Alvar was on the verge of suicide, but gave up the attempt feeling that the disposal of the self belonged only to the *saririn* and that he had no freedom in the matter. The Lord alone is the source, *dharaka*; sustenance, *posaka*; and satisfaction, *bhogyā*. He alone satisfies spiritual hunger and thirst, and is the end of all hedonistic desires.

The intensity of love, *anuraga* destroys the distinction and difference between the lover and the beloved. On one occasion, the Alvar imitates, like the *gopis*, the ways of Isvara and experiences cosmic consciousness. From this stage, he suffers the anguish caused by *vislesa*. Life becomes unbearable for him as he struggles and suffers till the time of his final union with the Divine.

*Vislesa* provides the opportunity to the Alvar to think of the perfections of the Lord, His *kalyanagunas* and arouses devotional ardour. The Alvar is allured by the Enchanter and thrilled

by His touches. The Unknown and the Indistinct is now intuited as the 'dark gem'. It may not be the integral experience of the Brahman in the super-sensuous sphere of *Paramapada*. But it has all the vividness of that experience owing to his devotion of love. His God-intoxication finally leads him to *samslesa* - the soul-sight of His bewitching beauty. With his self-feeling dissolved in the Supreme Self, the Alvar has sudden onrush of joy, rapturous and ecstatic. When Beauty rushes to the embrace of the beloved, the Alvar dissolves himself in the arms of Ecstasy.

The Alvar expresses the nature of the Brahman as Bliss insatiable. The joy of communion with Him is never ending; the self emerges from *ananda* only to merge in It. The rapture of communion overflows and inundates the senses. The Lord of love enters into the whole being of the Alvar, communicates His joy to it and makes it pulsate with joy. The Alvar is immersed in divine deliciousness, and the thirst of ages is satisfied.

Melting with gratitude, the Alvar offers himself to the Beloved and then feels that, since the *jiva* is the body of the Lord, self-gift to Him has no meaning as He alone is the giver and the gift. The Lord is the life of the Alvar and the Alvar is the life of the Lord, and the joy of union is reciprocal on account of the reversibility of relationship. The relish of love increases with enjoyment and is, therefore, fecundity. Even *moksa* has no value if it is not for His satisfaction.

In his exalted mood, the Alvar loses himself in the love of all living beings and feels that every *jiva* should attain the state of the Brahman and be free from the sorrows of *karman*. The Brahman seeks His home in the inner self of the Alvar, and thus satisfies His soul-hunger. The Brahman realizes His nature only by enveloping the Alvar and devouring his individuality. Sensation, form and self melt into Him, and finite thought expires in infinite bliss. When

the body of the Alvar is at last dissolved in death, the freed self merges into the Absolute, the sphere of eternal bliss.

*Atmavivaha*, spiritual marriage, is another extraordinary delight in mysticism. It is based on the eternal value of *bhagavat-kama*. The most inspiring example of such spiritual marriage is furnished in the life of Andal who, filled with *Krsna-preman* even in her girlhood, pours out her flaming love in lyric poetry in Tamil, unmatched for its thrilling power.

In her Tiruppavai, Andal gathers together a band of mystics who, like her, were seized with *Krsna-preman* and became God-intoxicated like the *gopis*. They all hurry to the Home of Love in Vrndavan to awaken the sleeping Beauty and pray for the fulfillment of their spiritual longing. In another poetic work Nacciya Tirumoli, she pours out her burning passion for union with Krsna. When there is no response to her message of love, she pines away in gloom. Then she invokes the aid of *Manmatha*, the lord of conjugal love. Even his shafts have no effect on the Ravisher of souls. Her passivity gives way to aggressive love. In its frenzy, she assaults the Lord with a view to piercing His heart with wounds of unrequited love. The Lord could no longer resist the call of such unearthly love. The mystic consummation follows with the doors of the sleeping Beauty of Srirangam Temple flung open. Soul meets soul, and Andal rushes into the arms of Love, and her separate being melts away in the ecstasy of union.

*Krsna-lila*, as enshrined in the Bhagavata, is the expression *par excellence* of the divine *lila* of love and is the foundation of Vedantic mysticism. In Bhagavata, Krsna is a mystic who shines in every *jiva* as its uncreated light, and sports with it. Metaphysics is transformed into mysticism when the *tattva* is defined as absolute Beauty with an *aprakrta*, formless or super sensuous form of its own. The supreme *hita* is *preman* or *bhagavat-kama*. The

attainment of bliss is *purusartha*. Beauty feeds love and love has its fruition in bliss.

## 12. The Theology of Srivaisnavism

Ramanuja's Visistadvaita, which is the theology of Srivaisnavism, seeks to determine the exact relation between the Lord and Sri. Srihashya of Sri Ramanuja is the substratum of the theistic School of Srivaisnavism. It has later given rise to two distinct Schools of interpretation formulated by Vedanta Desika and Pillai Lokacarya, over centuries.

As elucidated in Srihashya, the first two chapters of the Vedantasutras form a metaphysical enquiry into the nature of *Sat* as the supreme *Saguna* Brahman, *tattva*. The third chapter defines the nature of *hita* as *vedana*, *upasana* or *bhakti*, and *prapatti*. The last chapter brings out the meaning of *purusartha* as the attainment of the Brahman. The four chapters of the Vedantasutras are a systematic elucidation of the truth, step by step, from the first *sutra* till the last. Every *adhikarana*, section of this *Sariraka-sastra* is an intuition, *anubhava* of the Brahman. What is metaphysically determined as ultimate ground of all existence is also the supreme end of man's spiritual quest, and yields a specific *anubhava* of the divine perfection.

Vyasa-siddhanta-martanda establishes that each *adhikarana* proves a philosophic truth, and is a spiritual experience, *anubhava* of an attribute of Narayana. The *adhikarana-ratnamala* equates Narayana with Srinivasa. The Vedantasutras consisting of 156 *adhikaranas*, sections are valued as gems of the perfections, *kalyana-gunas*, strung together by devotional art. The Absolute of the Upanisads is equated with the supreme Narayana, the God of religion, and is finally identified with the Redeemer, Srinivasa.

The first *iksati-adhikarana* discusses the Chandogya text and establishes the truth that the *Sat* without a second is the Brahman, the Supreme Self. The one without a second is the metaphysical self, and not the mathematical aggregate or whole of

parts. By its self-creative urge, it wills to be the many and becomes the manifold of *cit* and *acit*, and becomes their source and *sesin*. The cosmic process is the self-differentiation of Isvara.

From the religious standpoint, the *adhikarana* is a religious experience, *anubhava* of the *Sat* as the self of Svetaketu. The Brahman, the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, is the *Atman* of the *atman* of Svetaketu. The Self that is the ground of the macrocosm is also the self of the microcosm. It brings out the Visistadvaitic truth that the self of the external world is the self of every finite self. The world order as the expression of the creative urge of the Brahman is really His *lila*. The creative urge becomes an aesthetic impulse and is transformed into the religious motive of redemption. Soul-making is the sport of the *raksaka*, and He shapes matters and moulds the soul to make it His own.

The next *anandamaya-adhikarana* discusses the Taittiriya text and establishes that the Infinite alone as the *prakarin* can have infinite bliss and not the finite self. The Brahman is blissful and imparts Its nature to the *jiva*. The Highest and the one who attains the Highest are not identical. This *adhikarana* expounds, from the *anubhava* aspect, the nature of the ecstasy of the unitive consciousness, *brahmananda*. The Brahman is the transcendently blissful Being of beauty delighting in communicating His bliss to the devotee, *bhakta* and enabling him to revel in the rapport of communion.

The next *antar-adhikarana* refers to the supreme sinless Self with a transcendental form, *aprakrta* of His own whose ravishing beauty fills the *yogin* with ecstasy, even more than His *svarupa*. The next *adhikarana* refutes the mechanical theory of the universe and states that the term *akasa* in the Chandogya text is not the elemental ether, but refers to the Supreme Self, *Paramapurusa* as a world ground with an infinity of perfections, who is at once the supreme and the only way to life. This

*adhikarana* explains that the *jyotir-vidya* in the Chandogya Upanisad refers not to physical light but to the Highest Self with infinite splendour. On the religious level, this *adhikarana* points to the existence of an absolutely luminous region of eternal bliss, as distinguished from the phenomenal world of *lila-vibhuti* which expresses His sportive activity and redemptive joy.

These opening *adhikaranas* define the experience of the Brahman as the ground of existence, His blissful nature, His *svarupa*, *kalyana-gunas*, *paratva*, *bhogyatva* and *divya-mangala vighratva*. They also establish the truth, according to Visistadvaita, that the Brahman is the Supreme Self other than *prakrti* and *jiva*, is possessed of infinite auspicious qualities, and has a divine form of His own which is not due to *prakrti* and *karman*. They also state that the loving meditation on the Self as the self of one's self leads to the attainment of eternal bliss.

In its *anubhava* aspect, the *brahmavidya* directs the aspirant to the practice of *bhakti* and *prapatti* as the supreme means of attaining oneness with the Brahman, *samya*. The Brahman is identical with Vasudeva who resides in all and from whom all derive their being, and also Bhagavan with the six attributes, namely, *jnaana*, *bala*, *aisvarya*, *virya*, *sakti* and *tejas*. *Samya* consists in attaining the likeness of Bhagavan. Spiritual and divine consciousnesses are similar in content, but not identical in existence. The essential idea of *bhakti* is to intuit the Infinite as the meaning and goal of the finite, and thus enable the seeker of God to attain the world of the Brahman.

The Sutrakara establishes in these *adhikaranas* that the Brahman is the All-Self, the inner ruler of all *jivas*, the Infinite in the finite, and the source of its vision. The Supreme Self is smaller than the smallest and higher than the highest.

Ramanuja establishes that the Being described in the Mundaka Upanisad as warp and woof of earth and heaven is the highest Self as the *saririn*, and not the *jiva*. The *Paramatman* as the inner self of the *jiva* enters into the warp and woof of the world process with a view to spiritualizing the *jiva* and finally *brahmanizing* it. This includes logical immanence and spiritual transcendence. Visistadvaita accepts the reality of all things and thinking beings, but insists on a sense of proportion. It distinguishes between the demands of the logical intellect of unity and the spiritual needs of the union with the Brahman. The Brahman as the immanent ground of existence is the goal of transcendent experience. The Infinite is in the finite self with a view to infinitizing its content. The metaphysician who thinks of the Brahman in the universe becomes the *mumuksu* who seeks the same Brahman beyond it. Therefore, in the *anubhava* stage, the arithmetical idea of the whole and the metaphysical view of a self or a system gives place to the mystic consciousness of God, *brahmadrsti*, and attaining the world beyond of the Brahman or Isvara. As any perennial river finally loses itself into the sea, the finite self absorbs itself into the Brahman by divesting itself of the differentiation of name and form due to *karman*. It becomes one with the Brahman by losing its separatist self-feeling, but not its self-existence.

As for the *aksara-vidya* of the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad related in the Sutras, Visistadvaita states that the Brahman is the sustainer of all beings. From the point of view of spiritual experience, *anubhava*, the *vidya* inculcates the worship of the Brahman as the cosmic ruler, the father of all *jivas*. Besides, He is the inner ruler and His redemptive will is self-revealed on earth and beyond. From the *anubhava* aspect, the Brahman is higher than the highest in a world beyond the terrestrial and celestial worlds, and is alone the object of apprehension and attainment. *Paramapada*, the supreme abode, transcends the sphere of *karman*,

and the *mukta* enjoys the ecstasy of the intuition of the Brahman in the world beyond.

Visistadvaita states that the Brahman exists in five forms. They are the eternal in the world beyond, the infinite that creates the finite, the immanent that resides in all beings and incarnations, historical and permanent. The inner purpose of this five-fold function of the Brahman is to enter into humanity and redeem it from its *avidya-karman*. *Sarira-sariri-sambandha* is the three-fold relation between the Brahman and the world of *cit-acit*. It means that the finite is rooted in the Infinite, sustained by Its will, and serves Its redemptive end as a free agent. The Brahman, according to Visistadvaita, is the *saririn* and is the life of our lives. He is the inner Ruler immortal in all beings. Every term, thing or thought that connotes the *sarira* also connotes the *saririn*, as He enters into *cit* and *acit*, and gives them name and form.

Visistadvaita emphasizes that the Brahman is infinite bliss and when the devotee intuits the Brahman as immanent in all beings, he does not see anything apart from Him and, therefore, experiences infinite bliss. The world of phenomenal experience is essentially blissful as it is pervaded by the *Bhuman*. But the finite self, affected by *avidya* in the form of *karman*, has a fragmentary view of the world as, owing to its distorted vision, it sees apart from the Brahman. It, therefore, suffers from the sorrows of the divided consciousness. But the seer who has *brahmadrsti* is immersed in the bliss of the *Bhuman*. He revels in the Self and enjoys the universe as his wealth, *aisvarya*. The finite self connotes the Brahman as its true self, and this meditation on the *Bhuman* leads to the attainment of *brahmananda*. Thus, the philosophic knowledge of the *bhuma-vidya* leads to the mystic experience of the bliss of the *Bhuman*.

As for the *dahara-vidya* of the Chandogya Upanisad related in the Sutras, Visistadvaita states that the Brahman is infinite and

omnipotent while the *atman (jiva)* is finite. The predication of will to the Brahman, as stated in the Upanisad, is in no sense a bar to His infinity. The Brahman is absolutely free from the self-contradictions of the finite-infinite and even from a shadow of the imperfections of *karman*, and merit and demerit. Omnipotence is expressed in the absoluteness of His mercy. Out of His boundless love, Isvara sets aside His supreme glory, and becomes easy of access to all *jivas* by entering into their hearts. Within each *jiva* is hidden the *brahmapuri*, the rich treasure of absolute truth, goodness and beauty. Blinded by *karman*, the finite self is unable to discover it. When the self is morally cleansed, it intuitively itself, becomes serene and radiant with *bhakti*, and reaches the resplendent region of everlasting bliss with the saving grace of its inner light.

The thirty-two *vidyas* expounded in the Upanisads, and stated in the Sutras, only relate to meditations on the Brahman with the essential qualities of *satya, jnaana, ananta* and *amala*. They all point to the realization of the Brahman as the *summum bonum* of life. It, therefore, establishes that the ‘logical’ Highest of what may be called the ‘Pure Visistadvaita’ of the Sutras is also the ‘Intuitive Highest’ of the ‘Practical Visistadvaita’ of the Bhagavad-visaya.

The Arthapancaka, the main philosophic work of Visistadvaita, brings out the essentials of Visistadvaita in its fivefold aspect, namely the nature of Isvara, the *jiva*, the *purusartha*, the *upaya* and the *virodhin*. Each is analyzed into five forms with its own special features.

Isvara exists as *para, vyuha, vibhava, antaryamin* and *arcaa*. *Arcaa* as the permanent incarnation of the grace of God is most accessible to the *mumukshu*. The *jiva* is classified into five kinds, namely, the ever free, *nitya*; the freed, *mukta*; the bound, *samsarin*; the one enjoying *kaivalya, kevala*; and the *mumukshu*. The five chief ends of conduct are the performance of Vedic duties,

*dharma*; the acquisition of economic goods of life, *artha*; the enjoyment of sensual pleasures in this life and after, *kama; kaivalya* or *atmanubhava*; and the experience of the Brahman, *bhagavad-anubhava*. The five means of attaining the Brahman are *karman, jnaana, bhakti, prapatti* and absolute loyalty to the *guru* as a living mediator between the Lord and the *mumukshu, acarya-abhimana*.

The obstacles are also five-fold, namely, faith in other gods, means and ends other than those prescribed for the *mumukshu*, the mistaken faith in *svarupa-jnaana* as an end in itself, godlessness and the confusions relating to *prapatti*.

The Tattvatraya, another important philosophical work of Visistadvaita, is modeled on the Brahmasutras, and consists in three parts. Part I describes *atman* and its *jnaana*, and explains the classification of *atman*. Part II describes *atman* in its three aspects of *kala, suddhasattva* and *misratattva* or *prakrti* evolving into twenty-three categories. It is also known as *avidya* or *maya*. Part III is devoted to the understanding of Isvara including His *svarupa, rupa* and *guna*.

Vedanta Desika, three centuries after Ramanuja, defines Sriyah-pati as Lord and Sri as a dual-self, which is one in two, and two in one, and their cooperative identity is indispensable to the seeker after *mukti*. Redemptive mercy is coeval with exacting righteousness. In the eternal marital fusion of Divine Law and Divine Love lies the assurance that *krpa* is the crown and consummation of a contrite heart. If Isvara is omnipotent and mercy has only monadic power, the triumph of *krpa* over *karman* will only be contingent. Therefore, Sri is infinite, and not in finite. The concept of Sriyah-pati, in this context, recognizes the foundational truth of ethical religion that the holiness of law is ever wedded to the forgiveness of love. Each acts and reacts on the other. In their interaction lie the stability of the social and moral order, and the salvation of the sinner.

Pillai Lokacarya, after Vedanta Desika, argues, on the other hand, that there cannot be two infinities, which are all pervasive. The idea of dual-divine personality is against the monotheistic truth that there is only one God. Lakshmi is, therefore, finite like the *jiva*. But she is ever-free, unlike the bound-self. She is to be regarded as finite-infinite, and as a living link of love between Isvara and the *jiva*. She is the divine mediating link that intervenes between human culpability and the holy wrath of the Lord. She softens the severity of divine justice and changes the responsibility of the sinner into the mood of responsiveness to mercy. *Daya* conquers Isvara by its innate sweetness and beauty. It connotes the sinner by love. It thus mediates between the saviour and the sinner.

Thus, one School of Visistadvaita stresses the logic of monotheism. But, the other School recognizes the validity and value of the logic of the heart and the heart of logic. This School refuses to subordinate the ethical claims of theism to the religious demands of redemption. Visistadvaita, in either case, considers that Isvara is not merely a judge, but is also a deliverer. And the essential nature of the Brahman is to *brahmanize* the *jiva*.

### 13. Srivaisnavism of Visistadvaita

While Visistadvaita defines the Brahman as the Godhead that is the source of all creation, Srivaisnavism, in its religious aspect, identifies the same Godhead as unity in Trinity with Visnu pervading all *jivas*, and *vaisnavizing* their nature. It defines the function of Visnu as *Sriyahpati* (Visnu and Lakshmi), which consists in universal redemption.

In the history of Indian philosophy, Visistadvaitic Srivaisnavism occupies a central position both as philosophy and religion, as a meeting of the extremes of monism and pluralism, and of non-dualism and theism. Its main thrust is devotion to Visnu with His consort Lakshmi as the All-Self and Redeemer of all. The cardinal teaching of Srivaisnavism is that God who is transcendental Love incarnates again and again into human history without renouncing His infinity to redeeming the wicked, and to seeking the *jnanin*

The concept of Fatherhood and Motherhood of God connotes more spiritual intimacy than the external view of Isvara as the Lord. The true Infinite is not the Almighty, but the Giver of all good to every *jiva* which is an image of the Infinite. Isvara is not a mere life force or creative will, but a self communicating love and the conserver of the eternal values of life. The Creator sows the seed of the self into the womb of the matter and makes it into His own image. The divineness of the self consists in its regaining the quality of godliness and the eternal values of life. *Prakrti* is moulded for the making of the cetana. Every *jiva* is thus, as it were, the son of God, and is the heir to immortal life and joy.

The theistic idea of God as the Father of all is a living faith in the Lord of the supreme abode entering into the self with a view to redeem it from its career of self-alienation and sinfulness, and transforming it into His own likeness, *sarupya* and *sayujya*.

Theism, in the strict sense, holds that the Lord is the life-giver as well as law-giver, who demands absolute obedience to the law of righteousness. Creative unity presupposes the uniqueness of the Creator and the fidelity of the creature to God the Father, and collision with His will entails punishment. He elects the good, and eliminates the wicked. He is thus a savior and judge. Meek submission to the will of Father, in utter self-effacement and prayerfulness, is pleasing to Him, and merits redemption.

The act of prayer arises from the inner attitude of prayerfulness. It is not a vain repetition of words or bargaining with God for worldly goods. It is the absolute trust in the Father, which consists in the thought 'Thy will be done'. It is the attitude of the blessed son to the Father blossoming the relation of the *jiva* to Isvara in the form of father-son relation, *pitṛ-putra-sambandha*. This concept presumes that every *jiva* is divine and its divinity consists in regaining the quality of god-likeness.

When religion is conceived in terms of will and justice, it demands the adoration of the Creator as the Father of all, *jagat-pitṛ*. But when religion is conceived in terms of redemption, justice is transformed into mercy. Mahalakshmi resides in the heart of religion as the embodiment of saving grace. She is the concretion of *krpa* and *karunya*. She offers an eternal assurance to the erring humanity that the reign of righteousness is at heart the reign of redemptive mercy.

The Lord is the dispenser of justice according to merit, *karma-phala-datr*. Though He is the saviour, justice is an insistence on the fulfillment of the moral law by retribution and recompense. But, in the case of Lakshmi, retribution is transformed into forgiving love. Love pervades law, and tenderness overpowers it. Lakshmi lives in the ever-blooming lotus of creative life and is the heart of divinity. She depends absolutely on the Lord, belongs to Him only, and is depended on by the *sesa*. As the link of love, She mediates

between the Infinite that is omnipotent and the finite that is impotent. Thereby She transforms the majesty of law into the might of mercy.

*Daya* has supernal beauty and sweetness. By Her beauty, Lakshmi lures the Lord and turns Him into the saviour. She draws the sinner by Her sweetness, and the sinner is saved by total submission to His will. Thus, in the ethical religion of Visistadvaita, Srivaisnavism, the metaphysical truth of the Absolute as the Supreme Self, and the *jiva* as His *aprthak-siddha-visesana* is restated as the creator of the world and the conserver of values.

To the *mumuksu*, the Lord and Lakshmi are one though, to the analytic intellect, they may appear as different and discrepant. The ethical idea of justice, *dandadharatva* and the religious idea of redemption, *daya* are reconciled in ethical religion. It has its roots in justice, and fruition in forgiveness. The Lord rules by law and Sri lives by love, and the two are eternally wedded to each other.

The Srivacana Bhusana of Ramanuja, a principal work of Srivaisnavism, is aphoristic. It is quite popular on account of its main religious motive and value. It consists of four chapters. The first chapter brings out the status of Sri in the salvation scheme as the divine mediatory, *purusakara* between the *cetana* and the Lord, with her unique qualities of being His alone, *ananyarhatva*; dependence on Him, *paratantrya*; and *krpa* as exemplified in Sita's life. She joyfully submits herself to Isvara, as she has her being in Him and belongs to Him. She always intercedes on behalf of the sinner by pleading for his being forgiven. On the other hand, she subdues the retributive will of Isvara by the beauty of her enticing love. On the other hand, she melts the heart of the sinner by her infinite tenderness.

The divine grace is spontaneous and not conditioned by the effort of the self as in the case of the *bhakta*. Of the five-fold forms of divine grace, *para*, that of the Brahman in *vaikuntha*, is remote like the raindrops in cloudland. *Vyuha* is like the waters that encircle the cosmic egg. *Antaryamin*, the indwelling Lord is like the spring in the earth to be discovered. *Vibhava* is like the occasional freshets in a river that come and go. It is only the *arcaa*, the reservoir of divinity, which remains and is ever available to the *cetana* who thirsts for God. The Lord is Himself the *upaya* and the *upeya*. The true meaning of *prapatti* is not winning the grace of God by self-effort but by responding passively to its free-flow.

The second chapter dwells on the superiority of *paragata-svikara*, the Lord seeking the sinner to *svagata-svikara*, the devotee seeking the Lord. Grace is the gift of God flowing spontaneously like mother's milk. Total faith and self-surrender result in operative divine grace, stable and spontaneous. When man seeks God, even *prapatti* is futile. But when God elects the devotee, even his sinfulness is ignored. *Prapatti* has its fruition only in service to God and the *bhagavatas*, in a spirit of utter humility and with no trace of egoism.

The third chapter assigns the highest value to the benediction offered by the devotee, *mangalasaana* in his intense solicitude of love to the Lord for His eternal reign of grace, like the Nammalvar. The fourth chapter prefers the grace of *acarya*, *acaryabhimana* to the grace of God. This is for the reason that, while the Lord is both just and merciful, the *acarya* is moved only by mercy. The worship of the *acarya* became in later days a main feature of some sects of Srivaishnavism. The work concludes with the statement that service to the *acarya* and the *bhagavatas* irrespective of their station in life is the highest and the only means of attaining God.

Vedanta Desika is another great philosopher of Visistadvaita. He is unrivalled in *jnaana* and *vairagya*, and is the main propagator of *Udaya Vedanta*, spreading the gospel of *prapatti* as a Vedantic means of attaining the Brahman. He bridges the gulf between *bhakti* and *prapatti* duly reconciling the moral and spiritual needs of *karman* and the religious needs of *krpa*. He is a metaphysician and a devotee of the highest order.

His contribution is immense in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and religion. In logic and epistemology, he reconstructs the Nyaya-Vaisesika system in the light of Visistadvaita. He simplifies the categories and includes, among the *pramanas*, the teachings of Alvars terming them Dramidopanisad. His work Nyayaparisuddhi expounds the nature of the three main *pramanas*, and proves the authority of the *Pancaratra*. His Sesvara Mimamsa is a reconstruction of Jaimini's Purva Mimamsa by integrating the two Mimamsas, and controverting the atheistic interpretation of the former.

Sri Desika's metaphysics has a negative and a positive side. On the negative side, it is a refutation of rival systems. In his Tamil work Paramatabhanga, he refutes the prevailing philosophical systems of Madhavacarya, in the light of Visistadvaita. In his works Satadusani and Vaditraya-khandana, he repudiates *mayavada* on the lines of Ramanuja's criticism known as *saptavidhanupapatti*, and also the two Schools of *Bhed-abheda*.

On the positive side, his philosophical work Tattva-mukta-kapalika is a Visistadvaita exposition of the nature of *acit* or *jada*, *cit* or *jiva*, *mukti*, *adravya*, *buddhi* and *Isvara*. Another work Sarvarthasiddhi is a more detailed exposition of the same truths. Nyayasiddhanjana, another work, consists of six sections dealing with *jada*, *jiva*, *Isvara*, *mukti*, *buddhi* and *adravya*. His commentaries on Isavasya Upanisad and Bhagavad-Gita controvert the Advaitic theory of *ajnaana* and *akarman*, and defend the

Visistadvaitic view that the Brahman is *saguna* and not *nirguna*, and that *karman* is transmuted into *kaimkarya*.

Vedanta Desika's Vedantic ethics insists on the performance of the imperatives of duty as divine commands according to each man's station in life determined by his *karman* and *gunas*. In his work *Vairagyapancaka*, Desika insists that man cannot worship God and mammon at the same time. The divine treasure is infinitely more valuable than the earthly pleasures. His aesthetic philosophy defines the Brahman as the beautiful and blissful. He prefers *bhakti* to the *rasas* extolled by mere aesthetics.

Vedanta Desika expounds the essentials of theistic Visistadvaita in a popular way in his masterpiece called the *Rahasyatrayasara*. In this work he follows the *Sutra* method of developing the whole theme in terms of *tattva*, *hita* and *purusartha*. The supreme *tattva* is Sriman Narayana as a *saririn*, or the self of the *jiva*, being its support, *adhara*; controller, *niyantr*; possessor, *sesin*; and master, *svamin*. He is Himself the *upaya* and the *upeya*. The means of attainment, *sadhya-upaya* is *bhakti*; its alternative is *prapatti*. The *siddha-upaya* is the free causality of God Himself. Though the prime cause of salvation is the grace of God who is the *siddha-upaya*, the aspirant has to deserve it, at least by seeking it. No doubt the mother's milk is ever ready to flow out, but the child has to apply its mouth to the teat. This *sadhya-upaya* determines the nature of the recipients of the grace of the Lord who is neither arbitrary nor capricious ruler. This treatise also describes the life of the *prapanna* and his integral experience of the Brahman in *vaikuntha*, in the state of *sayujya*.

In another work *Paramapadasopana*, Desika constructs a spiritual ladder, as it were, from worldliness to *vaikuntha*, the abode of Reality. In this pathway to Reality, the main milestones are the metaphysical knowledge of the Brahman arrived at by *viveka*, the moral progress of the *mumuksu* through *vairagya*, the religious

striving by *bhakti* or *prapatti* and, finally, the mystic ascent to the Absolute.

Pillai Lokacarya is another great exponent of Visistadvaita and Srivaisnavism after Vedanta Desika. After Pillai Lokacarya, the Visistadvaita philosophy split into two pronounced Schools - Tenkalai and Vadakalai. There are eighteen points of difference between the two Schools, which are mostly doctrinal. They may be grouped under the principles relating to *tattva*, *hita* and *purusartha*.

Among the epistemological ways of knowing the Brahman, the Vadakalai School insists, after Vedanta Desika, on the integrity of *Ubhaya Vedanta* and the equal validity and value of the religious authority of the *rsi-s* and the Alvars. But the Tenkalai School stresses more on the value of Tamil Prabandha on account of its pure *sattvika* and *vaisnava* character. The Vedantic view of the entry of the Infinite into the finite is interpreted by the Vadakalai School as coexistence, but by the Tenkalai School as pervasion.

The main point of controversy between the two Schools relates to the nature of Lakshmi. The Vadakalai School recognizes the equal religious value of justice and mercy. It, therefore, regards Sri as infinite, *vibhu* and defines the divine nature as non-dual ontologically, but dual functionally. Isvara and Isvari are two in one like the flower and its fragrance. Her redemptive mercy is omnipotent. The unity of the Lord and Sri, *mithuna* is vital to the *mumuksu*. On the other hand, the Tenkalai School is more monotheistic in denial of the dual nature of the Infinite. This School relegates Lakshmi to the level of a *jiva*. Both the Schools are, however, one in insisting on Her *krpa* as essential to *mukti*. As divine mediatory, She intervenes between the sinner and Holy. She transforms the former into a *mukta* and the latter into the Saviour.

As regards the nature of the *hita*, *summum bonum*, the Vadakalai School recognizes the superiority of *bhakti* and *prapatti* to *karman* and *jnaana*. It insists on the equal validity of *bhakti* and *prapatti* as means to *mukti*. But a Vadakalai prefers *prapatti* on account of its ease, immediacy, naturalness and universality. With a view to reconciling the opposites of *karman* and *krpa*, the Vadakalai School insists on the need for the *mumukshu* to deserve the grace of God before he desires it. It, therefore, formulates the theory of *vyaja* and *akimcamya*, consciousness of unworthiness as an occasion for redemption and restoration. The human will is to subserve God's will as it belongs to Him. It is *paradhina-kartrtva* and not *svatantra-kartrtva*.

On the other hand, the Tenkalai School rejects the above views of the Vadakalai School. It emphasizes the absoluteness and unconditional nature of God's grace, *nirhetuka-kataksa*. Responsiveness of the grace of God is not dependent on the human initiative. 'Whom He chooses, unto him, He reveals Himself.' This School believes that *bhakti* itself is the consequence of antecedent grace of God. *Karman*, *jnaana* and *bhakti* have independent values determined by the nature of the *aspirant*, *adhikaran*.

The Vadakalai School defines the effect of *vatsalya* in the divine nature as the removal of *dosa* and cleansing the soul. The Tankalai School considers that *vatsalya* connotes delight in *dosa*. It is the nature of forgiveness to welcome the sinner and not to penalize him for his wrong-doing.

For the Vadakalai School, *daya* is realized in the removal of another's suffering. But, for the Tenkalai School, it is entering into the sorrows of another, *paraduhkhe duhkhitvam*. On the social side, the Vadakalai School insists on the performance of *svadharma* even in the stage of *prapatti* as *kaimkarya*, and in conformity to the divine command. But the Tenkalai School suggests that the acts of the *prapanna* are amoral, and *varnasramadharma* does not

apply to him. As for *purusartha*, the Vadakalai School contends that the *kaivalyarthin* is on the path to perfection, *Paramapada*. But the Tenkalai School assigns to him a place in *Paramapada* itself.

Anyway, the differences between the two Schools from the philosophical point of view are negligible, and only relate to Vaisnavite theology. Srivaisnavism, as a theology of mystic love, is deeply interested in synthesis and harmony without destroying individuality. It works for universal salvation.

Srivaisnavism, as a living religion, owes itself to Ramanuja. He has moulded it into a religion of *sattvic* love based on *sastraic* authority and spiritual experience. Visistadvaitic Srivaisnavism lays stress on personal mystic experience rather than on supernaturalism and historicity. It guarantees God to all persons, and affords a philosophic basis for spiritual democracy. For Ramanuja, God is love, the *atman* is eternal and the *Paramatman* is immanent. The idea of God as the *saririn* of all and as indwelling love is the contribution of Ramanuja. This concept offers the most inspiring motive for philosophic enlightenment and achievement of social solidarity.

Hinduism, in its literal sense, is the theory of the 'history of the unity of nature' as a fitting environment for the knowledge of the individual, as the eternal and immutable *atman*, and the realization by him of the Deity that is immanent in all beings as their *saririn*. This account of Hinduism is at all levels with the Visistadvaitic Srivaisnavism, which takes into account the unity of physical nature, the need for self-realization, and union with Divinity that is in every individual. Visistadvaitic Srivaisnavism thus considers God as love, and religion as the life of God in the love of man, and insists on the dual discipline of thought and feeling in its scheme of devotion as *bhaktirupapanna-jnaana*.

## 14. Evolution of Vaisnavism

### Narayana-Visnu

The Vaisnava religion revolves round the worship of the Supreme Deity Narayana-Visnu and His numerous manifestations. The epics and the Puranas do not differentiate between Narayana and Visnu. The Mahabharata generally speaks of the deity as Narayana, and the usage of the other name Visnu is relatively rare. It, therefore, follows that the predominance of the Visnu element in a religion known as Vaisnava is a later development. In the beginning, Narayana appeared to be the deity *par excellence*.

Narayana is a non-Vedic deity mentioned for the first time in two passages in Satapatha Brahmana. One passage refers to Narayana, by means of sacrifice, having placed Himself in all the worlds, the gods, the Vedas, the vital airs, etc, and all things were placed in Him. The second passage also expresses the same idea though differently. It states that by performing the pancaraatrasattra, or the five-day sacrifice, Narayana gained superiority over all beings and became identical with all beings. The Purusa-sukta is said to be His litany. These passages indicate that by the time of the composition of the Satapatha Brahmana, Narayana was a deity of considerable eminence.

There are different attempts to trace the original meaning and source of the term Narayana. A passage of the *udyoga-parva* of the Mahabharata and also the *narayaniya* state that the Godhead is the refuge of all men. So God is known as Narayana. The term Narayana means the resting place or goal (*ayana*) of *nara* (man), or a collection of *narah*, that is, men. In the Vedic literature, *ayana* is used in the sense of 'going', a 'path' or 'road'. Following the Paniniya-sutras, Narayana means the place where men go. It means that Narayana stands for the entire settlement, the collective entity of human beings.

The conception of Narayana as a deity embodying the whole universe is a logical development of the meaning of the term denoting 'the dwelling place or resort of a collection of men'. The idea of a universal form (*visva-ruupa* or *viraat-ruupa*) of the deity popularized by the Gita appears to have been originally associated with Narayana.

Aryadeva, a Buddhist scholar of the second century AD, attributes a few verses to the deity Narayana that the Godhead is manifest as Visnu among Adityas, as Vaasudeva among the Vrsnis, as Sankara among the Rudras, Kapila among the Siddhas, Prahlada among the Daityas, etc. By implication, the Godhead is Narayana Himself.

The terms *bhagavat* (blessed lord), *bhakta*, *bhakti* and *bhagavata* are derived from the root *bhaj*. In its earliest use in Vedic literature, the root *bhaj* means 'to divide', 'to distribute', 'to allot', 'to share with' or 'to partake of'. Similarly, *bhaga* in Rigveda means wealth, share, a lucky share. The affix *vat* denotes possession. As such, the term *bhagavat* means 'possessed of wealth'. The term *bhakti* is closely related to *bhagavat*, and denotes 'a portion' or 'share' of the wealth. Similarly *bhakta* is one that is 'assigned', 'allotted' or 'distributed' of the wealth.

Thus, if *bhagavat*, the possessor of the *bhaga* is Narayana, the symbol of the collective entity of men, *bhakta* is the individual member that receives *bhakti*, a share of the *bhaga*.

In a Rigveda hymn, a prayer is addressed to god Bhaga, described as Bhagavan. It is invoked that, through him, the worshippers may also become *bhagavantah*, the possessors of wealth. The worshippers are denoted *bhagavatas*.

In Satapatha Brahmana, there is a reference identifying Narayana with *Purusa*, the Primeval Being, and describes him as

Purusa-Narayana. The text narrates that Purusa-Narayana conceived the idea of the *pancaraatra-sattra* with a desire to pass over all beings, and become everything in the universe, through the five-day sacrificial session, described as the *purusamedha*, the immolation of man. This passage discloses Narayana's connection with the institution of human-sacrifice, though a ritual.

The association of human-sacrifice with Narayana in the form of the ritual *Narayana-bali* is described in some Grhya-sutras. It is said that the rite of Narayana-bali, an offering to Narayana, should be performed for the sake of those who die an unnatural death, commit suicide, or are slain, and for all those for whom cremation is forbidden.

The cult of Narayana discloses prominent influence of the ascetics. The Mahabharata speaks of Narayana as a great *yogi* and ascetic, who is constantly engaged in practising penance at Badrikasrama with his double Nara, who was born as a result of his austerities. The *santiparva* often connects Narayana to *yogis* and *yogic* practices, and describes him as a master of *yoga* (*yogesvara*).

The vision of Narayana beheld by Narada in the White Island holding a sacrificial altar, a water pot (*kamandalu*), a bundle of *kusa*-grass, white gems, a deer skin, a wooden staff, and a blazing fire stick corroborates the view that Narayana is conceived of as an ascetic god (Mahabharata. XII.326.9). Narada identifies Narayana even in the midst of several classes of ascetics and hermits. This establishes that from the very beginning the *Pancaratra* has been connected with ascetics. Further, *Narayana-bali* is the rite to be performed not only for those who meet with unnatural death, but also for the ascetics. An inscription of the Deccan of the sixth century AD provides for regular performance of *Narayana-bali* for ascetics.

Narayana is sometimes identified with Prajapati-Brahma. In Satapatha Brahmana, Narayana is conceived of as cosmic god. In course of time, the work of creation also was attributed to him. This apparently led to his identification with Brahma, the creator god of mythology. The Manusmṛti, in its account of creation, identifies Narayana with Brahma. The creation legends in the Vayupurana also identify the two deities at several places. In this Purana, Brahma, in answer to the query of god Visnu, expressly states that he is Narayana, the creator of the world. This also establishes that the identification of Narayana with Brahma precedes the former's identification with Visnu.

The Visnupurana mentions Brahma as one who is known as Narayana and attributes the Fish, the Tortoise and the Boar incarnations to the former. This passage reiterates the earlier traditions that ascribe these incarnations to Prajapati Brahma.

The Brahmandapurana identifies Brahma and Narayana at three places. The Markandeyapurana speaks of Narayana as the lord of the universe, that is the form of Brahma. These references establish that Narayana is initially identified with Brahma, and later with Visnu. As Narayana is revered more and more as a powerful deity, Brahma is relegated to a subordinate level.

As for Narayana's identity with Visnu, the Maitri-Upanisad is a forerunner. This Upanisad identifies the soul (*atman*) with several gods enumerated as Isana, Sambhu, Bhava, Rudra, Prajapati, Visvasrj, Hiranyagarbha, Satya, Prana, Hamsa, Saasta, Acyuta, Visnu and Narayana. The order of the gods enumerated suggests that Visnu and Narayana are closely associated, and have prominent similarities. In the Mahabharata and the Puranas, the first four names of the deities refer to the deity Rudra-Siva, the next three to Prajapati-Brahma and the last three to the supreme deity of the Vaisnavas. However, in the Mahabharata, the identity of Narayana and Visnu is an established fact.

Visnu is a Vedic god, and has risen to the level of the highest divinity in post Vedic times. In Rigveda, only five hymns are addressed to him; his name is mentioned about a hundred times. Statistically, he is considered a deity of the fourth rank based on the number of references made to him.

He often appears in the role of an assistant to Indra, and is considered inferior to him. But there are indications that, even in the age of Rigveda, he was considered to be a great god. It is suggested that he may have been more popular among the masses whose ideas and inclinations are not recorded in the Vedas.

A majority of scholars are of the view that Visnu represents a form of the sun in Rigveda. But others are of the view that the solar traits of the deity represent only one aspect of the deity connected with vegetation and fertility. But the principal attribute of Visnu is considered to be his power to pervade and penetrate the regions of the universe. Etymologically, the word Visnu means one that enters or pervades. Other scholars also make a similar suggestion that Visnu represents a power dwelling in all things, pervading and penetrating them.

In the Satapatha Brahmana, Visnu is identified with the sacrifice. In the early Sutra works, oblations are offered to him in many *srauta* and *grhya* sacrifices. With the rise of Buddhism, the cult of Indra becomes discredited, and Visnu appropriates many myths and features of Indra. In the Mahabharata and the Puranas, considered subsequent to the advent of Buddhism, Indra is a subordinate divinity that can maintain his position only through the grace of Visnu.

The identification of Narayana with Visnu has further contributed to the rise of Visnu in the religious movement in India. By the fourth-fifth century AD, the Visnu element asserted itself fully. The Bhagavad-rupa or the Virat-rupa of God in the Bhagavad-

Gita becomes the Visnu-rupa in the Anu-Gita. The term *vaisnava* as a worshipper of Visnu finds its place in the latest components of the Mahabharata. The shift to Visnu element symbolizes the fusion of diverse trends originating from Narayana, Vaasudeva and other divinities, and their assimilation into Vaisnavism, resulting in its recognition as an orthodox Vedic cult.

## Sankarsana-Baladeva

Historically, there was association of the cult of Sankarsana-Baladeva with the cult of Vaisnavism as it had evolved in the pre-Christian era. Sankarsana-Baladeva appears in Mahabharata as a warrior of the Vrsnis, son of Vasudeva and Rohini, and the elder brother of Vaasudeva-Krsna.

Sankarsana is mentioned in Arthasastra, which states that spies disguised as the ascetic worshippers of the god Sankarsana could mix the juice of the *madana* plant in the sacrificial beverage, and offer it to the cowherds of the enemy. This passage does not specifically link Sankarsana to Vaasudeva-Krsna, but apparently links the predilection of his votaries to indulge in some kind of sacrificial drinking. Visnu Purana also speaks of the god Sankarsana as a heavy drinker with eyes rolling in the state of perpetual inebriety.

The cult of Sankarsana-Baladeva discloses many features of snake worship. A passage in Mahabharata (XIII.132.8-11) speaks of a serpent Baladeva, the foremost of the *Nagas*, who should be worshipped on the eighth night of the dark fortnight of the month of *Karthika*, for obtaining the strength of the Boar incarnation of Visnu. Some texts describe him as of white complexion wearing black or blue garments, and his icons are provided with a snake-canopy overhead.

On the basis of the iconographical similarities between the images of Baladeva and the *naga* statues, some scholars assert that the mythical character of Baladeva evolved out of a *naga* deity. The irascible temper of Sankarsana-Baladeva and his drinking habits are indicative of a *naga* origin. His emblem, the palmyra-leaf, also points to it. In Ramayana, it is the thousand-hooded serpent *Ananta* that has a three pointed palmyra banner of golden

colour. The banner is said to have been established by the gods on a lofty mountain in the direction of the east.

The three-pronged motif is significant. It denotes the naga character of the emblem; and the flagstaff of Baladeva is also described as three-headed. He is regarded as an incarnation of *Sesanaga*, and it is said that a snake came out of his mouth at the time of his death. The *naga* element of the character of Sankarsana-Baladeva is what makes him distinct.

Although Sankarsana appears as a Vaisnavite divinity in Mahabharata and the Puranas, there are traces of his close connection with the cult of Rudra-Siva also. The Pancaraatra Samhitas often identify Sankarsana with Rudra-Siva. The Brahmandapurana states that Rudra is a *halayudha*, one who holds the plough as his weapon, that is, Sankarsana, in one of his incarnations. The Visnupurana speaks of Sankarsana-Rudra, who comes out of the mouth of the serpent *Sesa* at the end of every *kalpa* (aeon).

The process is sometimes reversed. The Harivamsa states that *Ananta*, another name of *Sesa*, is invariably identified with Sankarsana born of Siva. The palm tree, associated with Sankarsana, appears on the coins of the *Bharasiva-nagas*, the devotees of Siva. It is possible that the three-forked palm standard of Sankarsana may have, in its genesis, some affinity with the trident of Siva. Incidentally, it is worthy of note that the god Siva is also intimately associated with *nagas*.

One of the prominent characteristics of Sankarsana is his association with agriculture. The god Siva is also intimately associated with fertility and agriculture. He is usually worshipped in the form of a phallic emblem. Scholars hold that his worship prevails mostly among the agriculturist classes.

Both Siva and Sankarsana are known as *musalin*, the wielder of the pestle, an implement for cleaning rice. In the case of Sankarsana, the agricultural aspect is very much in evidence as he figures as holding the pestle and the plough. The Visnu Purana narrates how the river Yamuna changed its course on being pulled by his ploughshare, and how Hastinapura, pushed by his pestle (*musala*), became inclined towards the Ganga. He is stated to have killed the monkey demon *Dvividā* that destroyed crops. The term ‘sankarsana’ literally means the act of ploughing or furrowing, and it bears witness to his agricultural character. The association of the *nagas* with fertility is well known, and the agricultural character of the god Sankarsana further supports his *naga* origin.

The Arthasastra speaks of Sankarsana as a deity of the ascetics with shaved head or braided hair. Traditionally, Sesa-Sankarsana himself is said to be a great *yogi*, the teacher of the whole universe, who himself taught the Bhagavata-*dharma* described in the Sattvata Sastra. The Mahabharata records that Sankarsana expounded the *sattvata-vidhi* or the *sattvata* mode of worship at the end of the *Dvapara* and the beginning of the *Kali*.

In the *Vyūha* cosmogony, he is said to perform his functions through *bala* (power) in view of his being Baladeva, but, sometimes, through *jnaana* (knowledge). The work Visnudharmottara equates him with knowledge. It further associates him specifically with the *Pancaratra* knowledge.

It is curious that the pre-Aryan fertility god Siva is also conceived as a great *yogi* and ascetic. Incidentally, the word ‘*yoga*’ is sourced in yoke meaning an agricultural implement. Some scholars speak of the ‘homology between *yogin* in the state of concentration and plant life, and the coalescence of one or the other form of *yoga* with agricultural magic’. All this is suggestive that the association of Sankarsana and Siva with agriculture grew out of the magical rites accompanying agriculture.

The worship of Sankarsana appears to have been quite popular in the fourth century BC. Megasthenes seems to have recorded that the Greek author (referring to Dionysus) states that the Indians speak of three individuals of the same name appearing in different ages, and they assign different achievements to each of them. The oldest of these is Indos, apparently the same as Indra, ‘who crushed grapes and discovered the use of the properties of wine’. It is said that Dionysus was aware of the method of growing figs and other fruit trees, and taught this knowledge to others whence he was called Lenaios. This name may be a corruption of *Lingin*, a name of Siva. The third god, spoken of in this context, is *Katapogon*. Megasthenes states that he was so named, as it is a custom among Indians to grow their beards with great care. Evidently, *Katapogon* is the same as the *Kapardin* meaning one wearing braided and matted hair. The epithet is usually applied to Siva; but it may have been applied to Sankarsana, too, as the worshippers of Sankarsana were said to wear braided (*jatila*) hair. At any rate, the three gods are apparently Indra, Siva and Sankarsana, all associated with wine and renowned for their bacchanalian habits.

Nevertheless, Sankarsana-Baladeva appears as a Vrsni hero, the elder brother of Vaasudeva-Krsna in Mahabharata. The historicity of the Mahabharata legends is generally accepted without critical evaluation. On the other hand, Sesa-Sankarsana, a *naga* divinity, was identified with Baladeva of the Vrsnis, who was not a deified hero, but an associate male god of the tribal Vrsni goddess Ekanamsa.

The inscriptions of the first century BC bracket Sankarsana and Vaasudeva. Patanjali seems to have known the legends of the two gods in their more or less present form. He mentions Baladeva and Vaasudeva among the Vrsni names, and speaks of Krsna as second to Sankarsana, thereby indicating their relationship. Some other epithets of Sankarsana such as Rauhineya, the son of Rohini,

Langalin, the wielder of the plough, and Rama (Balarama) are also mentioned in the Mahabhasya. Evidently, the identification of Sankarsana with Baladeva of the Vrsni lineage was accomplished long before Patanjali.

The epigraphic and the literary sources indicate that, in the beginning, Sankarsana and Vaasudeva were placed on an equal footing, and the position of the former was in no way inferior to that of the latter. An inscription of the first century BC gives precedence to Sankarsana as it records ‘Sankarsana-Vaasudevaabhyam’, and describes him as Bhagavat and Sarvesvara, along with Vaasudeva. Another inscription of the same period found in a cave at Nanaghat invokes the two deities in a similar fashion. Later, with the development of the *Vyuha* theology, Sankarsana is invariably mentioned after Vaasudeva in the texts of the Gupta period. This establishes that in the first century BC, the popularity and prestige of Sankarsana was quite undiminished.

A passage in Mahabharata (I.189.31) states that Sankarsana and Vaasudeva were incarnations of two attributes of the supreme God Narayana-Visnu. Thus, both are considered partial incarnations of a great god. Sankarsana is described as the first born, the older of the two.

The existence of a powerful cult of *Sesa* is in evidence as a passage in the Mahabharata (XII.271.50) states that some people describe the highest region as that of Visnu, some as that of Brahma, some as that of *Nara* and some others as that of *Sesa*. The Ramayana (III.14.7) speaks of *Sesa* as one of the *Prajapatis*, the progenitors. The cult may have been originally totemistic.

The cosmogony myth of *Sesa* balancing the world on his thousand-hoods is often referred to in the epics. Sometimes he is described as transformation, or a form of the god Narayana-Visnu,

as in Mahabharata (III.187.10). Garuda once tried but failed to find the end of the serpent, identical with Visnu and Baladeva.

But, later, the cult of Sesa-Sankarsana became subordinate to the syncretistic divinity Narayana-Vaasudeva. In a passage of Mahabharata (V.154.31), Baladeva admits frankly that he could not dare cast his eyes on the world without the favour of Krsna, and so he followed and assisted Kesava in whatever he wished to achieve.

Traditionally Visnu is described as resting on the serpent *Sesa*, lying on the waters. The myth indicates the subordination of the *non-brahminical* divinity of agricultural masses to the *brahminical* god Narayana-Visnu. The Bhagavatapurana (X.78.21f) states of the murder of a *brahmin* by Sankarsana, which he had to expiate by going on a long pilgrimage.

The alliance of the cult of Sankarsana with that of Vaasudeva and Narayana must have promoted the cult of Vaisnavism by winning over a large number of agricultural populations to its fold. But it also pushed the worship of Sankarsana-Baladeva into the background, as, in the *vyuha* theology, he came to occupy a mere emanatory form of the supreme god Vaasudeva-Narayana.

The Puranic tradition describes Revati, the daughter of the King Raivata, as the wife of Baladeva. The Visnupurana (IV.1.67f) states that the King Raivata went to heaven to seek the advice of Brahma in seeking a bridegroom for his daughter. By the time he returned to the earth, millions of years had passed by and people had become much shorter in height. The king gave Revati to Balarama in marriage. With a view to curbing her undue height, Balarama bent her down with the point of his plough (V.95).

A passage in Mahabharata (III.219.228) states that Revati is a disease-goddess and afflicts children. The Susruta (31.10-1) states that Revati is unusually tall, fierce and hunchbacked, wearing colourful garlands and earrings. Popular mythology seems to have postulated a matrimonial alliance between the two divinities.

The region of Mathura seems to have been the strong hold of Sankarsana-Baladeva worship. Most of his exploits such as dragging of the river Yamuna, killing of the demons Dhenuka, Pralamba and Dvidida are set in this location. The Visnupurana (V.251f) states that Krsna, having once left Vraja for Dvaraka, never returns. But Baladeva comes back to dally with the cowherds and to drink the wine that flows out of a *kadamba* tree in Vrndavan. The Bhagavatapurana (VI.14-6) describes how Citraketu, the king of the Surasena country, after purifying himself with a bath in the Kalindi River (Jamna) received the *mantropadesh*, which enabled him to have a vision of Lord Sankarsana. *Naga* worship appears to have been very popular in the Mathura region. A large number of *naga* statues have been discovered in its vicinity.

In the centuries just preceding the Christian era, the worship of Sankarsana was quite popular. There is considerable archaeological and literary evidence, apart from the two inscriptions stated earlier, indicating the popularity of his cult during this period. A stone idol of Sankarsana attributed to the second century BC, discovered near Mathura, is now preserved in the Lucknow museum. It has a snake-canopy, and holds a plough in one of its hands. Two fan-palm capitals discovered among the ruins of Besnagar, and one at Pawaya, in the former state of Gwalior, now in Rajasthan, indicate the existence of temples of Sankarsana at these places in the second and the first centuries, BC. The Mahabhasya of Patanjali also speaks of the temples of Balarama and Kesava. A passage occurring in the Buddhist canonical commentary, the Niddesa of the first century BC, refers to the worship of Baladeva.

In the post-Christian era, references to Sankarsana are rather rare. The Nasik cave inscription of 149 AD compares Gautamiputra Satakarni to Rama, that is Balarama, and Kesava, in progress. There is no epigraphic mention of the deity in the third century AD.

There is a reference to Sankarsana in the opening verse of Swapnavaasavadatta of Bhasa, and in some early Tamil poetic literature. Nakkirar, an early Tamil poet of the third century AD, compares his patron, a Pandya king, to Siva, Baladeva, Krsna and Subrahmanya in various qualities. Silappadhikaram, a work of the fifth-sixth century AD, speaks of the existence of the temples of these four gods in Madurai and Kaveripattanam. This is evidence that in the South, the worship of Sankarsana-Baladeva flourished unabated till the sixth century AD.

The discovery of a number of fragmentary images of the deity Sankarsana in the Mathura art of the Kusana and the Gupta periods indicates the continuance of his worship in the North also. The Gadhwa stone inscription of 468 AD speaks of the installation of an image of Anantaswamin, who appears to have been a form of *Sesa-Sankarsana*. Another inscription of the last quarter of the fifth century AD, found near Gawhati, records the construction of a cave temple for Bhagvat Balabhadraswamin.

Sculptures found at Mandor in Rajasthan, and Paharpur in Bengal relating to the fourth and the sixth centuries AD respectively, depict the exploits of Balarama. They portray him more as the elder brother and associate of Krsna than an independent deity. The rock-cut statues of Balarama and Revati, discovered at Rupabasa in the former state of Bharatpur, are reckoned among the best specimens of the Gupta art.

With the growing popularity of Vaasudeva-Visnu, the cult of Sankarsana ultimately lost ground. The later iconographic texts make a distinction between the incarnate and emanatory acolyte

form of Sankarsana. In the former, he retains traces of his *naga* and agricultural origins. But in the latter, he becomes quite indistinguishable from Vaasudeva-Visnu. The only distinction between an emanatory image of the *Vyuha-Sankarsana*, and of Vaasudeva-Visnu is only in the order of emblems held in the hands of the images. The emblems held by both the images are the same, but the order or sequence of the emblems in the hands is different. This only shows that the personality of god Sankarsana was completely absorbed into that of Visnu, as time passed by.

Thus, it may be seen that Sankarsana was originally a non-Vedic, non-brahminical agricultural divinity with considerable following among the masses. He was identified with Baladeva of Vrsnis prior to the second century BC. This led to the alliance of his cult with that of the god Narayana-Vaasudeva, which in course of time completely dominated it, and absorbed it into its ever-expanding fold.

## ***Pancaraatra***

The *narayaniya* section of the Mahabhadgavata describes the worshippers of the Supreme Deity Narayana-Visnu-Vaasudeva as *saattvatas*, *bhaagavatas*, *pancaraatraas* and *ekaantins*. While the terms *saattvatas* and *ekaantins* are related to specific clan groups of devotees, the *bhaagavatas* and the *pancaraatraas* are connected genetically with Narayana. While the term *bhadgavata* is connected to the concept of Narayana as Bhagavat, the interpretation of the term *pancaraatra* needs investigation.

As a name of the worshippers of Narayana, the term *pancaraatra* occurs, for the first time, in the *narayaniya*. Apparently, the epithet *pancaraatrika* means the performance of the *pancaraatra* sacrifice stated in the Satapatha Brahmana.

*Pancaraatra* samhitas and other related literature do not throw adequate light on the concept of *pancaraatra*. According to Narada Pancaraatra, *raatra* means knowledge. Hence *Pancaraatra* is a system, which deals with five kinds of knowledge, namely, cosmology (*tattva*), the science of liberation (*muktiprada*), the science of devotion (*bhaktiprada*), the science of *yoga* (*yaugika*), and that of pertaining to senses (*vaisesika*). But the other extant *pancaraatra* samhitas do not subscribe to this line of thought. Further, the text of the Narada Pancaraatra does not also testify to this scheme.

According to the Isvara Samhita, the religion taught by God to the five sages Sandilya, Aupagaayana, Maunjayana, Kausika and Bharadvaja in five successive days and nights came to be known among the people as *pancaraatra*.

According to the Sriprasna Samhita, *raatri* means nescience (*ajnaana*), and *panca* derived from the root *pac* means that which

cooks or destroys. Hence *pancaraatra* is the system that destroys ignorance.

According to Padma Tantra, the system is so named because, just as the sun dispels the night, the *Pancaraatra* dispels the other five systems namely, the Yoga, Samkhya, Buddhism, Jainism and Paasupata.

According to a passage in the Agnipurana, the five elements (*pancabhutih*) forming the body of Brahma are known as *pancaraatar*. Some scholars contend that the term *raatra* originally denotes 'element', and those who regard the creation to consist of the five elements are described as *pancaraatrins*, and those who consider the creation to consist of seven elements are considered as *saptaraatrins*, and so on.

There is another view that the reverence shown to the five Vrsni heroes Sankarsana, Vaasudeva, Pradyumna, Saamba and Aniruddha may have been the reason why the cult worshipping the said heroes is known as *Pancaraatra*.

The Parama Samhita, an early *pancaraatra* text, states that the five primary elements (*pancamahabhutih*), the subtle elements (*tanmatrah*), individuation (*ahamkara*), mind (*buddhi*) and unmanifest (*avyakta*) – these five are the *raatra* (the body or the gifts) of *Purusa*, and are described as *pancaraatra*.

The Ahirbudhnya Samhita, one of the earliest *pancaraatra* works, states that the system which recognizes the fivefold forms of the deity, namely, the *para* (transcendent), *vyuha* (emanatory), *vibhava* (incarnatory), *antaryamin* (immanent) and *arcaa* (that which resides in idols and images) forms is known as *pancaraatra*. The believers in the fivefold manifestation of the deity are known as *pancaraatrins*. The doctrine of *pancaraatra sattra* appears to

have evolved to develop the principle of the five forms of the deity Narayana.

But the concept of the fivefold nature of the deity Narayana does not appear in the *narayaniya* or the earlier *pancaraatra* literature such as the Sattvata Samhita, the Jayakhya Samhita, etc. It is, therefore, logical to presume that the concept of the fivefold nature of the deity Narayana is a later systematization when the *pancaraatra* theology had already reached a high state of development.

The Mahabharatha connects Narayana with the *sraaddha* ceremony, funeral rites performed in honour of the departed spirits of dear relatives. The rite of *narayana-bali* is also developed into a kind of *sraaddha*. In both these rituals, the offering of black sesame (*tila*) is an essential rite. Further, Narayana is not mentioned in the Veda as a deity. In this background, the *bhagavata-pancaraatra* faith is considered non-Vedic.

The literature of the *Pancarattras* is voluminous, comprising both revealed and non-revealed matter. The *Pancaraatra* texts such as Sriprasna Samhita and Isvara Samhita trace the origin of their system to the Ekayana-sakha, now extinct, of the Rigveda, mentioned in the Chandogya Upanisad. The Isvara Samhita says that the Ekayana Veda was the source of all other Vedas, and that it originated with Vaasudeva and existed in its earliest stage at the root of all other Vedas, which were introduced at a later stage and were, therefore, called 'vikara Vedas', according to Dasgupta.

By the time of the epics and the puranas, the *Pancarattras* had already gained an honoured place among the Sastras. Skandapurana reckons them as one of the Sastras. The Varahapurana not only places the *Pancaratra* on par with the Vedas but also opines that where Vedic mantras are not available, one may worship according to *pancaratra* rites. *Pancaratra*, however,

lays emphasis on rituals and worship, though, on the practical side, the *pancaratrikas* teach the cult of *naiskarmya*.

The metaphysics of the *Pancaratra*s is essentially theistic. Sankara makes it clear that the *pancaratrikas* teach Vaasudeva to be the Supreme Being with all auspicious attributes, and that the manifestations of the Lord - Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Samkarsana are, at the same time, identical with original (*mularupa*) Vaasudeva, in essence and in attributes. This establishes that, on the *pancaratrika* view, there is no distinction of substance and attributes in God or among His various manifestations. This view is further elaborated in the *pancaratrika* works such as Paramopanisad and the Brahmatarka. The doctrine attributed to the *bhagavatas* is in line also with the other *pancaratrika* works such as Naradapancaratra, Padma Tantra, Mahavaraha, Caturvedasikha, etc.

Ramajuna quotes from Parama-samhita, a *pancaratrika* work to prove conclusively that the metaphysics of *Pancaratra* is out and out realistic, recognizing an eternal matter, *prakrti* and equally coexistent souls. The individual soul transmigrates on account of beginningless *karma* associated with *vasanas*, at the will of God. For removal of these *vasanas*, a certain power emanates from the Brahman. Impelled by His will, it works within the inner microcosm of man to free the *jiva* from bondage and reveal innate bliss to him.

The *Pancaraatra* Samhitas lay great emphasis on the attainment of knowledge, and the practice of the eightfold *yoga*. The emphasis on *yoga* and *yogic* practices indicates the association of the ascetics with the cult.

The following are among the available *Pancaratra* Samhitas and Tantras.

Agastya-Samhita  
Aniruddha-Samhita  
Ahibudhnya Samhita  
Brahma-Samhita  
Brihat-Brahma-Samhita  
Isvara-Samhita  
Kapinjala-Samhita  
Gautama-Samhita  
Citrasikhandi-Samhita  
Jayakhya-Samhita  
Jayottara-Samhita  
Nalakubara-Samhita  
Naradiya-Samhita  
Pancaprasna-Samhita  
Parama-Samhita  
Paramapurusa-Samhita  
Parasara-Samhita  
Padma-Samhita  
Paramesvara-Samhita  
Purusottama-Samhita  
Pauskara-Samhita  
Bharadvaja-Samhita  
Bhargava-Tantra  
Mayavaibhava-Samhita  
Markandeya-Samhita  
Laksmi Tantra  
Varaha-Samhita  
Vasistha-Samhita  
Visva-Samhita  
Visvamisra-Samhita  
Visnutattva-Samhita  
Visnu Tantra

Visnu-Samhita  
Visvaksena-Samhita  
Vihagendra-Samhita  
Vrddha-Padma-Samhita  
Sriprasna-Samhita  
Sanatkumara-Samhita  
Sattvata-Samhita  
Hayasirsa-Samhita