

## **GOD IN THE PHILOSOPHY OR RĀMĀNUJA**

God in the philosophy, of Śrī Rāmānuja is not merely transcendent and immanent to the universe but is also the redemptive Creator. The pantheistic account of the Deity given by Advaita and Bhedābheda and the deistic account of Dvaita are mediated by Rāmānuja though his original conception of the organic relation of the Deity weight the Universe. The theism of Rāmānuja through his original conception of the organic relation of the Deity with the Universe. The theism of Rāmānuja claims to implement the truth of the Deity as immanent as pervading everywhere and at all times, and transcendent as Governor and Enjoyer. His 'otherness' in respect of the created is finely and superbly represented by His unique descents into His creatures and Creation for purposes of greatest value and worth to mankind and evolution, which is graciously and felicitously described as Līlā. The most important fact about the world and man is organism. The capital fact about God is that He is the Self of the organism. The organism (or body) is capable of two different states, namely a causal subtle state an effectual gross state, and in both the states, the Self is God, for He it is who determines the transition from the subtle to give gross. But He is not tainted by these processes in the sense that He is not limited or circumscribed or determined by the World or His body. The self cannot be a self unless it is free and potent enough to control its body, knows it so thoroughly that it can use it for its own free and sovereign purposes. Thus we find that Śrī Rāmānuja finds it necessary to determine the nature of the relationship that subsists eternally between the Self and its body. In doing so he defines the nature of a body. He describes the body as "that entity (*dravya*) which a conscious entity is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purposes, and whose nature consists in being a source of glorification to that conscious entity<sup>1</sup>."

This definition firstly does not limit the body in respect of its nature; it can be matter or spirit. That is the intention behind the use of the word whichever

substance, (*yaddravyam*\_). The Upaniṣads as well as the *Amśādhī Karaṇa* of the *Vedānta Sūtras* (II.iii.42.52) have clearly shown that the souls and matter are the body of Brahman<sup>2</sup>. The *Ahikuṇḍalādhikaraṇa* (III.ii.26-29)\_ definitely ascribes the status of body to the material world. Even though souls and matter are its body, their natures, namely, ignorance or materiality do not affect the Divine. This fact is affirmed by the actual and ever existent power of the Divine, which they implicitly obey. No limitation or impediments ever stand in the way of their being controlled, sustained, supported and enjoyed by the Supreme Spirit.

Venkaṭanātha expands the definition given by Rāmānuja and states that, “Any substance which, in a given state and as long as it is, is incapable of being unrelated to be a conscious entity, and which substance, in respect of its own

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<sup>1</sup> *Śrī Bhāṣya* II.i.9: *yasya cetanasya yaddravyam sarvātmanā svārthe niyatam dhārayatum ca śakyam taccheṣataika svarūpamca tat tasya śarīram*. Several definitions of the body are given by Vaiśeṣika and other schools which are all shown to suffer from narrowness. The Garbha Up. defines *śarīra* thus: “because three fires, kaśatāgni, darśanāgni and Jñānāgni reside in it (śrāyante).” This definition is also narrow, since it refers to mere residence.

<sup>2</sup> *Ch. Up.*XII.6; *Bh.Gītā.*XV.7

activities of which it is capable, has the nature of being normally determined by the latter, such a substance, in that state, is the body of that conscious entity<sup>1</sup>.” HERE Venkaṭanātha clearly points out that only substances not non-substances like mere consciousness which is but a *dharma* or characteristic function of the soul, and activities (*karma*) can be treated as bodies. Secondly, being more critical, he points out that it would not suffice to say that a body is a body at all times; that is to say, even when it is unrelated to the self or soul, as indeed there are cases when the body is separated from the soul on death. A body is a body only as long as there is an indwelling soul within. That is why the words *yāvatsattam* have been introduced (as long as it is). The third point is, that the

body should be something that is very closely related to the soul or the conscient entity of which it is said to be the body. This is the relation of inseparable conjunction in relationship (*apr̥thaksiddha-viṣeṣa-ṇatva*) which is the cardinal feature about the relationship between God and the world and God as the souls. They are thus the bodies of God. Now the full nature of the body will not be clear unless as Rāmnānuja points out the body is being supported not fore the sake of the body, but for the sake of the purposes of that Soul (*svārthe*). It is clear that Venkaṭanātha in his definition of he body does not mention this teleological independence or supremacy which points out that the ends of Brahman or God are not ends dictated by the world or the souls in any manner. God's own purposes are certainly not

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<sup>1</sup> *Nyāya Siddhāñjānam. Yasya cetanasya yaddravyam dravyam yayatsattam asambhandhānarham svaśakye niyantavyasvabhāvam, tadavastham tasya śarīram. P.100*

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purposes of achievement, since He does not need anything, for in Him all are fulfilled and complete. What then can be the purposes of God? A body as defined in relation to the souls which are limited and struggling to gain the fourfold ends of life such as *dharma-artha-kāma-mokṣa*, can be said to have some *prayojana*, or goal beyond them, and therefore have some *svārtha* own purposes. But it is clearly indicated that the body should exist for His glorification. Now what is the purpose or what are the purposes. But it is clearly indicated that the body should exist for His glorification. Now what is the purpose or what are the purposes which God intends to realise in the universe if it be not for the sake of any of their ends. This is answered by the *Prajojanavattvādhikāraṇa* (II.i.32-36). Firstly, as in the case of the world, creation has only *līlā* for its purpose (II.i.33). It is God's absolute delight manifesting itself as play (*kri̇Dear Avadhani, Date*), that is facilely played and wonderfully manifesting His Nature. The differences in the world, it is pointed out, do not reveal any partiality on the part of the Supreme they are referable to the souls who have been in *samsāra* from beginning less

time and have gained the fruits of their good and evil deed. God has no ulterior ends to gain and His creative and other activities do not possess the specific need to achieve anything but to express His delight. At any rate the purpose is certainly not interest either in respect of Himself or in respect of the souls or material universe. If at all we have to state it as *svārtha*, the manifestation of His body composed of the conscient souls and inconscient matter is enjoyable to Himself. It is just possible that the delight may also be shared by the creatures, but it would not be an end or aim of the creative process. It exists primarily for the Divine and essentially for His delight. Rāmānuja's definition firstly declares that the aims and ends are God's and the souls and all others exist also as sources of glorification of Him (*śeṣataikasvarūpam*). The whole Reality is a living Reality having eternally God as Self.

Śeṣatva<sup>1</sup> of the individual souls and the world to the Deity is also an important aspect of the definition of the body. The glorification of God is the end and aim of souls. The distinction is usually made that this *śeṣatva* is *dāsativa* in respect of the conscient soul, as apparently the main feature of a good servant is to offer praise to the Lord for everything that is done and is being done through him. The prayer is not only in respect of the conscient soul, as apparently the main feature of a good servant is to offer praise to the Lord for everything that is done and is being done through him. The prayer is not only in respect of the greatness and glory of the Lord but also an absolute willingness to do the bidding of the Lord if thou wilt only glorify thyself in me", is also a revelation of the inwardness of complete dependence on the Lord. Venkaṭanātha points out that this is *aśeṣtānarham* the incapacity to be something that exists for the glorification of any other soul or end. This is a signal characteristic of the body. It is clear that this is an important religious sign or characteristic. So far as the world of matter is concerned it exists as absolutely controlled and sustained by the intelligence, wisdom and power of the Divine for His own purposes. The individual soul has consciously to become that.

It would be clear that the world and the souls are indwelt by the Lord or the Deity through His transcendent

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<sup>1</sup> Paragatādhānecchayā upādeyatma eva yasya svarūpam sa śeṣaḥ Paraḥ śeṣi: *Vedārtha Samgraha* cf. *Rahasyatrayasārā: Puru ṣārtha kāṣṭhādhikāra*.

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'moreness' and through His inherent power to bring them into existence or withdraw them from it, and to support and control them: as such they exist as a source of glorification to Him.

The theism that we find here is clearly a careful synthesis of immanence and transcendence. Thus when Dr. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the best statement of theism was made by Rāmānuja he stated a profound truth. That this statement is not a new theory but a restatement of an ancient Upaniṣads doctrine need not be overstressed. The fact that the many Souls and the matter are being sustained by the One supreme Being, not only sustained but also inseparably related to Him, the only One without a second like Him, shows that the pluralism of souls and the multiplicity of material modifications do not in any way interfere with the status of that Supreme Deity.

On the other hand, it appears that a clear and definite kind of theism can only survive when multiplicity is held to be real and not unreal, and monism as a metaphysics is ruled out. The monistic truth is the truth of self-Identity and it has either to accept the monotheistic view of One Single Deity who is the spiritual ground, cause and savior of the totality, or else it has to affirm that the totality is an illusion, the manyness is an illusion, world is an illusion and all manifestations are illusion. The only criticism that may be leveled against the acceptance of the monotheistic view by the monist would be that God in that case cannot be legitimately called the substance from which everything issues out, which according to it is a necessary premise of causal relationship understood in the sense of substantial modification or process. Now this criticism has been

answered by Rāmānuja very luminously. He states that God indeed is the material cause of the universe. The modifications happen in matter in respect of both its nature and qualities; and in the souls in respect of their functional consciousness (*dharmabhūtajñāna*) alone. They are the body of the Lord, both in their causal subtle state as well as in their effectual gross state. The changes in state in the “body” of the Lord stand to their respective previous states as effects. Thus the text “All this is the Lord,” means only that all this is the body of the Lord whether in their causal subtle state or in their effectual gross state. The Lord is actually the cause since their utter inseparable relationship with Him is the determining fact about their existence. They are thus ‘modes’, not modifications of Brahman. They are its ‘attributes’ but are not self-existing substances. They are not to be considered to be the main *upādāna-kāraṇa*, material cause of the world. A second criticism however can be brought. God cannot be said to be unchanging, *nirvikāra*, if He is the material cause. This, as has been pointed out, implies no change in His nature as the omniscient omnipotent transcendent and does not entail the conclusion that He cannot have even delight or Will to manifest His own supreme glory and infinity of attributes. A too wooden understanding of the word ‘nirvikāra’ has led to the conception of the monistic abstract unchangeably as the true real. It is clear then that theistic thought carefully eschews the abstractions of the monistic view and implements the truth of transcendence of the Deity with the help of the concept of real immanence. God brings about changes or wills changes in the conscient and the inconscient which form His body, to manifest His manifold powers or omnipotencies. In none of these activities is there to be seen any belittling of His supreme transcendence and power to execute the Will that is His. On the contrary, a theory which utters a warning note against any process does this on account of its fear of loss of transcendence to the Absolute. It is just like a man who having earned a lot of money in a raffle or speculation is afraid of losing what has been gained. Not such is the nature of real ‘moreness’ or transcendence. It is the height of perfect supremacy to be supreme in the involvement. That is the peak of the nature of the Deity. The monistic as well as the deistic views err in so far as they are not

sure about the real transcendence of the Deity. It is because of this, God is called a unique Being unlike every other being, bond or liberated or even the eternally free. Then, action is an involvement in process which might adversely affect their grains of 'moreness' in relation to the world. On the other hand any action of God is not an involvement but a spontaneous expression of His supreme Will (īlā). To the souls the possibility of action or fruits of action veiling or impending the consciousness is a terror; but to the Supreme Deity that action is not aimed at anything, is not done for any finite purpose, and as such is transcendent divine action, which is just an expression of transcendent purposes whatever these may be.

In theistic thought we find that the nature of the Deity is such that it grants satisfactory explanations about the relationships between God and the world, and between God and the souls. In Śrī Rāmānuja's exposition of theism we have a unique theory of relationship, namely *śāira śarīri bhāva*, body-soul relationship which has been the mystico religious doctrine of the ages, which reconciles fully the immanent and transcendent or relational and Absolute natures in the supreme Personality<sup>1</sup> of the Divine.

Intellectual Monism (not all monism) is antithetical not only to mystical consciousness but also to religious experience. This is so true that it is surprising it needs reiteration. We have seen how Śrī Rāmānuja points out the integral unit of the individual self and the Divine Lord, whose prakāra or śeṣa it is. This organic unit is the essential and real unity which does not destroy the integral multiplicity and the freedom that is being sought in the bosom of the Divine nature. Intellectual formulations of the relationship between the individual and the Supreme always end in dismissing the individual as a fiction or illusion or non-existence somehow entertained in the process; the process is then dismissed as an illusion, the cause of it being left at one stage to the One Supreme Being or Brahman or Absolute, and at another stage to the individual himself in his psychological disruption or to an indeterminable *tertium quid*. Experience having

been detrialized, the personality of the individual and its cosmic representation, God, are equally de-realized, and this is declared to be the experience which is beyond the relative. Since, however, the relative experience are conditional on an absolute Experience, and the relative must bear the stamp of

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Strong (*A Creed for Sceptics*) says, "The subject is a whole organism or self." (p.26) Stout and James hold that human personality is a property of an embodied self "primarily known from the inside by coenesthesia or bodily warmth and intimacy."

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reality even as that absolute Experience, it is surprising that the relative is reduced to nullity or at best to the status of the magical and to the illusion. This is impossible and is not verified by mystic experience. When mystic experience asserts the monistic truth it asserts the Organistic or Synthetic monism or Spiritual Union expressible only by such terms.

As Dr Schrader pointed out about the statements of identity in the Āgama śāstra, the mystical literature of the Āgamas of Pāñcarātra only mean practical oneness but not real oneness (Introduction to Pāñcarātra.p.91). There is no trace of Māyāvāda in this literature either. Śrī Rāmānuja finds the confirmations of his metaphysical views in the Pāñcarātra Āgama, already visible in the Mahābhārata Nārāyaṇīya section and the Bhagavad Gītā. God is the one Supreme Being who sustains and leads all. This Being is Grace-full, Merciful, Lovable and Adorable. He it is who has been described by all the Scriptures, Vedic, Āgamaic Bhāgavata and Āḷvār-literatures.

The union that meant seek, the immortality that is the promise of the knowledge of the Divine and Service of the Divine is a result of total surrender to God in every respect and integrally. God's Nature is described to us in the three excellent compositions of Rāmānuja, Śaraṇāgati, Śrīāṅga and VAikunṭha Gadyas. The Motherhood of Śrī who is eternally and inseparably with the Divine



Nārāyaṇa, is intimated and it is to Her who is Grace that the Surrender is made prior to appealing to the Divine Himself. God's transcendence, worshippingness (*bhajanīyam*), ease of accessibility (*saūlabhyam*), supreme forbearance and tolerance (*apāra-dhasatva*), supreme Blessedness (*śīlatva*), fullness of Nature in all planes and manifestations (*pariprṇatva*)<sup>1</sup>, and the six infinite and auspicious qualities which exist for the redemption and elevation and evolution of the Universe till that great Līlā of His creative Harmony is achieved, are mentioned along with the attributes of finitude and serviceableness of the soul who seeks Him; the means of attaining the Grace of God is stated seeks Him; the means of attaining the Grace of God is stated to be only through the constant repetition of the three sacred mantras of surrender to the Supreme, to the Supreme along with His Spouse, and utterance of and abandonment of the selfness or agency in all activities or *ahamkartṛtva*. Rāmānuja gathers into his Divinity the essential truths of the Mystic Experience of the Oneness of the eternal multiplicity as taught by the Vedic and Upaniṣads Ṛṣis, the Tantra-āgama Mystics and the Āḷvārs. It is this unique synthesis that grants to his system the living vision of the One transcendent Brahman, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa as indwelling in all, in whom all beings indwell, and through whom the Divine experience and the Divine Life are being achieved through the unique path of integral surrender.

Wer have sketched the contributions of the other schools to the idea of God. Rāmānuja gives the most comprehensive account of the Nature of the Deity. It is true that it appears to wear the rigid scholastic garb due to the historic period of his statements, but the poetic note suggests the immensities of his vision of the Integral Godhead which he represented by the term Viśiṣṭādvaita, or Śāṅkara System, Organicism, Realism, Theism and Pantheism meet in this view because it gives not a mere monotheism, nor a barren monism riddled with Māyā, or illusionism trailing it, but a wholesome Mysticism and Universe of God not a multiversity of polytheism.

The individual soul has been defined as of the nature of Jñāna and Ānanda, that is, it has and is knowledge essentially or substantially, and is and has Ānanda as its essential nature, its existential nature or *satta* is also granted by its essential and permanent relationship with the Divine as His *prākāra* or *viśeṣaṇa*, *śeṣa*, or *śarīra*. What is denied of it is *vibhūtvā* or *anātva* infinitude, But it is precisely this infinitude that it seeks in its religious consciousness. The methods of achieving this infinitude are these precise definitions of its approach to the sense of utter union which can grant the supreme felicity of feeling oneness with the infinite Being; this is the fullest delight, Ānanda-nature of the soul. This is *parama-sāmya*, because of having been accepted to equal participation in cognitive knowledge (*jñāna-dharma* or *dharma-bhūta-jñāna*). The fulfillment of this need of the finite is achieved by the indwellingness of the Divine in an integral manner and of himself in the Infinite Divine in His Vastness even and not merely through the permission of participation in Divine Works. This is the supreme achievement possible to the individual soul qua soul, and it is clearly visible in the writings of the most radical of mystics and religious souls that what is achieved is total infusions of the Divine being in the soul's nature, so much so, there remains not the slightest to make of finitude in its activities or enjoyments or knowledges, except is self-feeling of having been used or of being used as *try nimitta* (occasion) of the Divine by the Divine: as in the case of Arjuna, and in the case of Nammālvār. Sāṭhakopa sings 'I had never forget him, He made me Himself; He through me expressed Himself in several sweet correct rhymes on good theme:' (VII.9. Tiruvāymoḷi). Again 'Thou becomes my whole self.... Thou madest me Thyself wholly... I understand such a One who dwelt in my body, in my mind and in my soul... (VII.8) Such thoughts as these are very common in the revelation literature. There persists just that distinctive nucleus of feeling of being the finite simultaneously with the feeling of being possessed by the Infinite Divine, indwelt by the Divine. Sometimes that also is surpassed in the experience so as to abolish the very conception of finitude of the soul. But it remains as an infinitesimal even when surcharged with or taken up or occupied or embraced in an integral manner by

the Divine according to Theism. As Śaṭhakopa lived and showed, one ultimately must live by making God his food, his breath, his thought and his being.

Prof. A.E. Taylor writing in *Philosophy* (April 1941) on “*Back to Descartes*” commented on Bowmen’s ‘Sacramental Universe’. He pointed out that the real dualism is between subjective and physical rather than between matter and mind or objective and subjective since the subjective is always capable of being an object of Cognition. This, is all would agree, gets over that strange difficulty of most idealists who hold that the subjective cannot truly become objective, or who, reversing the position adroitly, hold that to be an object of consciousness is to become equivalent to matter itself, that is other than the subjective. Self-experience or existence of oneself is admittedly a cognitive fact which cannot be placed in the realm of the objective or the material and there result a contradiction in solipsistic philosophy which has to be got over only by a leap out of this predicament through an absolute experience that shall not in any sense appeal as subjective or objective. Prof. Taylor having thus resolved the dualism finds that the subjective and the physical are the two modalities, of being , and that nothing can be at once a constituent term of both modalities. But he finds that the “mind is in fact” compresent in the universe with the non-mental. This compresence is again only possible in virtue of a more intimate functional connection of a kind which must in the end remain a mystery for us, of the mental and non-mental, in fact of the existence of *embodied personalities* (pp.128-9). This mystery is not resolved by a mere reference to sacramental functions emerging in these embodied personalities, an emergence that is perhaps capable of being explained by the postulate of divine creativity. A system of values indeed emerges only because of the divine element pursuing its free and uninterrupted course of manifestations in varying degrees in the tissue of reality called the living being, which enfolds an intimate relationship between matter and mind, subjective and physical, and is functionally operating in a manner that is guided by the organic unity and law of growth. But as pointed out by almost all biologists, the operating factors like instinct and animal intelligence and insight

do not reveal the conscious thrust towards values and preference for ideals. And as such it must be concluded that it is only at the level of man that the sacramental or the organic-plus-value view emerges into view.

There must be no ultimate opposition between the realm of the material and the mental or between the realm of eternal immutable and the realm of change. The apparent contradiction raised between these two is due to an abstract tendency to treat mind or soul as immutable, or at least the ideas that the mind or soul as immutable, or at least the ideas that the mind or soul as immutable, or at least the ideas that the mind has or discovers enjoys in its own unique isolation in an abstraction-state of mind, as non-existent (in space and time world). The organic conception clearly points out that such a dualism is belied by the actuality of the organism which whilst it apprehends the eternal immutable also forms, selects and enjoys them in its own context and even creates them for its own benefit in the forms of space and time and under conditions of strict causality. Nor are we aware of any experience that is totally bereft of the organic. This it is that makes the organic conception of reality or the sacramental universe, if that is what is meant by it, a reality of the highest order. Both the idealistic and the realistic views, whether theologically stated or metaphysically sustained, are unable to bring about a real unity of the many which are as real as the multiplicity. The multiplicity enriches the unity whereas the unity sustains the ever emerging configurations of the totality wherein the several levels of reality are truly, and characteristically and dynamically supported. There are no sublations but only subordinations of the lower to the hierarchically highest. God is the perfect symbol and reality of the integral unification of the several strands of reality, being Himself the Highest under whom everything else is subordinated or subsumed. There is autonomy or freedom of movement in each plane or strand for an entity there in placed, but this autonomy works as a natural inward self-determination which is registering its subordination to the Totality or Reality or the pattern of Highest Existence or God. The autonomy of each suffers when it violates the central Being or God,

and entails disruption, disintegration, even a regression into the lower increasingly repetitive autonomies of the animal, and plant and metal. This is the principle of threat, death, sin and evil. That is why autonomy involves the responsibility to perceive and to know the inward Will of the Highest, or the central Being or God. It is always open to a soul to reach upto it in its moments of deepest submission, concern. Struggle for truth and aspiration for God, the Highest good.