

VIŚISTĀVAITA
AND
CULTURAL UNITY

It is well known that all philosophies aim at the knowledge of Reality in order that one may be in love with that Reality. An intelligent love of reality is about the most attractive endeavours of an awakened consciousness.

Speaking for Viśtādvaita as a life-view or Reality view that makes for love that in intelligent, spontaneous and full and integral, one can say that it tries to do justice to the totality of Reality, not only in its eternal aspect but also in its temporal aspect. The two have been distinguished generally as the *para* (transcendent) and the *a para* (other than the transcendent or temporal), as the *Nitya* (eternal) and the *līlā* (play). The *ubhaya* concept of Reality makes for an integral approach that does not sever the one from the other and helps also to pass from one to the other and interpret the one in and through the realization of the other.

Historically this system was formulated in clear and precise terms by Yāmunācārya but to have given it the shape and the fullness has been the work of Śrī Rāmānuja. The extraordinary unification of diverse-trends in religion, in scripture, in language, in ritual and in fact in all phases of cultural life goes to the far-seeing vision of Śrī Rāmānuja. One of the most interesting features of Śrī Rāmānuja. Philosophy is the concept or Real idea of *Ubhaya* (twofold unity). The concept of Reality is twofold; the concept of scripture is twofold (*ubhaya Vedānta*). The concept of language is *ubhaya*-twofold (Sanskrit and Tamil), so a great unification in all levels was attempted and successfully carried out by Śrī Rāmānuja. During his lifetime of nearly a century of years. The genius of Śrī Rāmānuja.

Thus forged a basic unity of twofold diversity – a real Advaita – concrete and satisfactory to the common man. It is the philosophy that helps the growth of

man who seeks unity in diversity, reconciliation and harmony in and through the world through God.

Such is the great experiment which unfortunately had tended to become a dogma but which is sufficiently pure and attractive to be a guide to the common man. Helped indeed by the modern unsatisfactoriness of all thinking that is not in love with reality Viśistādvaita can give a plausible account of Reality and help integration of man in Society through godly love that is philosophy. Indeed Bhakti itself is but the word for philosophical love of God for it means 'intellectual love of God' - *semusi-bhakti-rupa*. What is the generating insight or vision of Rāmānuja- his idea of God, the universe and man?

It is the idea or vision of Man and the Universe as the Body of God: it is the Vision or idea of God as the inward self of all that exists, temporal or eternal, minute or vast; this Vision of God as Self of all and yet far exceeding all, as the inner Rules immortal of all Nature and all souls was indeed already profoundly touched upon by the Upanisads. The Vast Universe was perceived as the Body of God, existing for the Divine: So too all souls, he liberated and the ever free and the bond souls were seen to be the body of God. This was a fact of Vision, certified by the earlier exposition of Yājñavalkya and the vision of Māarkandeya, the chiranjeevi, and Arjuna and others. This Vision of God is the central experience that made Viśistādvaita possible. The eternal and the temporal, the permanent and unchanging and the changing and momentary, the formless and the formed, the pure and the impure, all dualities find their resolution and unity in this Vision. We have to explain this Vision rather than dismiss it as not failing within the scope of our logistics.

This Vision is of course reiterated in different ways:

Yas sarveshu bhutesu tishtan sarvebhyobhutebhyo, antaro yam sarvani bhutani na vidur yasya sarvani bhutani śarīram yas sarvani bhutanyataro, yamāyātyeshs ta atmantaryamyamrta ityadhibhutam.

The Self is in all beings: they form His body. They know Him not. He the indwelling Self is the immortal. This is the truth regarding the elements and the souls.

Yājñavalkya also taught that we love all because of this Self in all: na va are patyuh kamāyā patih priyo bhavati atmanastu kamāyā patih priyo bhavati.

This Vision was sought by the seekers after the infinite. It is for this Vision that the Seekers who became Seers wandered in forest and court and performed rites and so on and spent several years with the great knowers (Brahmajñānis). It is for this Vision again, the lovers of the infinite and the Eternal, the Āivārs in the South sang their hymns in temples and practiced austerities to win the Diving Grace. For it is through grace of God alone this can be had: not by austerity nor by gifts nor extreme diligent study but by His grace: a grace that is the reward for true devotion to the Ultimate Truth, God- the philosophic love so to speak. God cannot be known, seen or entered into except through this pure philosophic love (BhaktyatvanaNyāya sakyaha).

The Universe or Reality as we know it comprises souls or selves, matter and God. These are the three irreducible factors of experience. Of ourselves we know through direct experience, of Nature or the external world including our bodies we have an idea through perception and sensations, of God we have hardly any notion except through philosophic search for Ultimate Cause and as necessity for being itself, which is the Unity of Nature, uniformity of existence and so on. The *tattva-traya* is accepted as the three fundamentals. Their unity is found in the Godhead being the Self of both the others. The Unity is in God and through God.

The inner direction of all Nature, its evolution and involution, through its three forces or gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, is by the Supreme Godhead. The individual souls owing to their karma find themselves enjoying and suffering in Nature and through knowledge and devotion to Godhead gain emancipation.

They realize that they too like Nature are the bodies of God, entirely dependent on God and subserving His ends. Their end is to serve God and God alone. This awareness does not come about easily. It comes about only through deep suffering that makes the soul seek to know its nature. It comes about when the soul realizes that its own experiences even are incapable of liberating it from a gloom. It comes about when the soul realizes that it is nothing at all – akincana for its everything can be removed from it. In its nakedness it realizes its true Self, the Divine Godhead who is all.

It is at this point of being—of becoming utterly nothing at all that one seeks truly essentially (*tattvena*) the Divine Lord and Self as its sole refuge. This is the prapatti or surrender that happens to the soul or that is made by the soul. The soul that has given up itself to the Divine knowing that the Divine alone is its Soul and essence and existence, experiences the inflowing grace of God which saves it from all fear, from Nature and others sarva-bhutebhyah. The Prapatti doctrine in the doctrine of sole surrender to the Ultimate Godhead and is assisted by the knowledge that God is the only Self of All and is the Protector of all. The surrender is followed up by placing oneself unreservedly at the hands of God. Prapatti is naturally followed up by bharanyāsa placing all one's burden on God, one's karma, one's Dharma etc. This is the counsel of the Divine. He who constantly remembers me and does my work, His yoga and kṣema do I take care of. This too is the meaning of the famous concluding śloka: Renouncing all dharmas seek sole refuge in me. Once this bhara-nyāsa takes place one is free from fear (nirbhaya). This is further completed when one offers oneself to the Divine Lord as His body, servant(kinkara). The offering of oneself (ātma-samarpana) is said to be also a kind of burden of oneself but it takes one to worlds beyond-to living and moving and having one's being in God everywhere and every when.

Once a soul elects the Divine, surrenders to Him absolutely, places all burdens on Him, and offers itself integrally to Him then the real transformation of the world vision happens. No longer - does it recoil from any one or anything,

nor show disgust to any one or thing. It sees all as the bodies of One God and the suffering that has been proclaimed as the first and primal truth of all existence by the Buddha and others is shown to be not so fundamental after all. It was an incentive to the search for meaning – evil is the stimulus, enforcing one to see the ultimate truth. Suffering, evil, sin too are seen to be from God so that the real can be searched and elected. The tāmasic or lethargic mood that accepts sorrow and suffering and change and death as inevitable and essential to reality or in fact the Sole reality or that all is illusion is triumphed over by the Vision of the Divine as Self. One begins to enlarge one's vision to embrace the whole of reality and perceive all as the Real in their eternal nature-including all that changes and perishes. This makes one see all in God and God in all, all as the bodies of God and God as the Self of all. It is in this sense that the great texts (mahāvakyas): Tat tvam asi, 'So' aham asmi, Aham Brahmasmi, Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma: have to be understood concretely rather than linguistically or symbolically or by contradiction.

The realization of the entire Reality in both its celestial and terrestrial forms, in its Nitya eternal form and play manifestation, in time, and space, is one of the basic integrations that the first integration of the individual with the Divine as soul-body makes for. So much so it becomes easy to seek to represent the eternal in the temporal, to bring the kingdom of God on earth so to speak. This endeavour was sought to be made, and indeed made by the cult or rite of the temple. The temple-centred civilization of the Śrī Vaisnavas followed up by others shows how the symbol was made real, and the real and the symbol were in the linga-lingi-bhava, even as the soul-body. The temple is the body of God and the Idol in the temple is the Self of whom all things are made. The experiences of the Alvars in the temples of God as Self of all is one of those profoundest contributions and this Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta was linked up with the Hoary Agama of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu-Bhṛḡu. Thus one more ubhaya emerges-one more samanvaya or integration not noticed earlier in the paper.

But all through there is no concession to polytheism or polyatry. The ekanta- mata, or parama-ekanti depends entirely an embodiment of godly nature-loving God in all and serving God in all, equally at home in this world as in Vaikuntha. Why go to vaikuntha when the Lord God is here on the Earth? Asks a sage of Vaisnavism.

The sense of equality samatvam-is followed up by bhratr bhava but it is transcended in the realization that God indeed is potentially present in everything, living and non-living, for God is cid-acid-visista always, in the subtle as in the gross condition and has to be loved. His beauty seeps through and through everything in nature and life and soul. This sundara-darsana of all nature as filled by God, as ensouled by God is an experience that combines the fullest purnata experience.

In society then one constantly pleads for the perception of God, the eternal through even the mortal sensory eyes and senses though it requires a special training. One beholds the fact that the senses that have had the inward touch and movement of God become transfigured and transformed or altered in their very nature and sees all as the Beauty of God. So the acit and asat and anānanda become transformed as the very expressions of the Supreme Divine Existence, Intelligence-Consciousness and Bliss not their contradictions. Viśtādvaita asks for no somersault of life and being in Nature but rather in oneself by making oneself in the Body of God verily.

The organic conception of man-God, and God-Nature is fruitful. The individual uniqueness is preserved because of the Divine infinity and one is closely related inseparably with God and through God with Nature and Society. This interior relatedness with all creation is profoundly transformative and one of abiding true knowledge-love that transcends all conflicts.

It would be Futile perhaps to speak of an organic conception of the State and the relationship between the individual and the State. The Hegelian mistake

of equating God with the State has to be borne in mind. But a theocratic conception of God as the Highest Good for all and as the direct interiorly revealing voice of God and vision may be fruitful. In any case the consciousness of man (dharma-bhutajñānā) has to be liberated firstly by God and through love of God philosophically, before one can speak of the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven.

We all seek Unity. But this unity must be impelled by love for positive active participating unity. Human love has its limitations. Mankind is cut across by all types of divisions, of course not un-surmountable through cooperative thinking and charity of being and sincerity. But racial, communal, doctrinal, dogmatic divisions do not wither away by the touch of clear logistics or systems of philosophy. Virtue or dharma is primary and man's dharma is to be the body of God. This central dharma will help the abolition of conflicts that arise from all levels of human existence, economic and political and social and religious. This too is the basic mantra of the Viśtādvaitasurrendering all dharmas seek refuge in Me. Surrender only to Narayana the Goal of all Narās Surrender to the twin deity, Narayana and Śrī so that you may attain immortal blessedness and freedom from all else.

It was in this spirit that Rāmānuja with one pointed vision treating all else as straw worshipped the Divine Lord's feet and thus attracted the whole universe to the Devotion of Him. Thus all being long to run after such a seeker and seer.

That is the secret of the success of Śrī Rāmānuja whose heart was the ocean of daya-love or self-giving and transformation of South India was the result and it had lasted for well nigh nine hundred years and all found the path to be true and sacred.

Man needs God-love for his very existence. God needs perhaps man's love for manifestation in and through Him.