

Śaṅkara Rāmānuja Madhva

Vidyālaṅkāra
Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao



Suramā Prakashana
Bangalore - 11

The Three Achāryās : Śaṅkara Rāmānuja Madhva

by

Vidyālaṅkāra

Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao



Suramā Prakāśana

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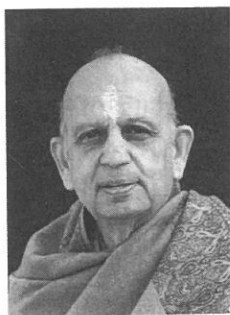
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About the Author



Prof S. K. Ramachandra Rao (1925-2006) was born in a conservative Madhva Brahmin family. He studied sanskrit in a pathasala in Nanjangud, and then learnt the prasthanatraya with bhasya under Palghat Narayana Sastri. He also studied Pali and Tripitakas from Narada Mahathera of Sri Lanka, and learnt Tibetan in order to learn Tibetan Buddhism. He obtained an M.A. in psychology from the Mysore University, and started his career as a research assistant in the Indian Institute of Science. He later headed the department of clinical psychology in NIMHANS in Bangalore.

A born teacher, he was a visiting professor at the Bangalore University teaching in the departments of psychology, philosophy, Indology,

social work and education. He headed the department of Indian culture at the Callison College, University of the Pacific, Bangalore Centre. He was a senior associate of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, and was on the guest faculty on Indian Institute of Management.

He was a member of the Karnataka State Lalita Kala Academy and Sangita Nritya Academy, had served on the Agama Board, Karnataka and was on the advisory committee of the T.T.D. He had been honored with the 1986 Karnataka Rajyotsava Award.

He was a prolific writer, artist, sculptor, musicologist, scholar and orator. He had written more than 150 books in English and Kannada apart from books in Sanskrit and Pali on various aspects of traditional Indian Culture. His books on Iconography and on Tirupati were given the state Sahitya Academy awards.

He had been honored with the titles Vidyalankara, Sangita Kalaratna, Vachaspati, etc. He had received the Vedaratna Samman from the Swami Gangeshwaranandaji Trust, Mumbai.

Preface

The Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao Memorial Trust was established about a year after the death of Prof. Rao. The first activity of the trust was to convert the lectures delivered by Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao into CDs and make them available to those interested. We thought that the next thing we should do is to reprint his old articles and smaller books. We chose a series of three articles that he had written for the Deccan Herald in 1966 on the three Acharyas Śankarāchārya, Rāmānujāchārya and Madhvāchārya. We selected this because this was a topic close to his heart. But as we read through the articles, we found that the articles, especially on Śankarāchārya portrayed a picture about Śankara that was contrary to what he himself had written much later. For instance, in 1966 what he wrote about Śankara was faithful to the common opinion of people. That Śankara was a Saivite, that he founded many mathas all over the country, that he tried to supplant Buddhism with advaita Vedānta, etc. But later he changed his views after much study. He was a great admirer of

Śankara. There was not a day when he did not study the works of Śankara, mainly his commentaries on Brahma sutras. He also studied with a critical eye the language in which Śankara wrote and the ideas that he tried to project. He was also influenced by the writings of Satchidānandendra Saraswati of the Ādhyātma Prakāśa Kāryālaya, another great scholar on Śankara. The result of all this study was that he arrived at conclusions that were very different from the popular opinion of people. We felt that to reprint his old articles as they were would be doing an injustice to his memory. We have therefore added some excerpts from his latest work on Śankara namely Śankara and Adhyāsa Bhāṣya published by Abhijñāna in 2002. This book is his original contribution to Vedantic studies, and he has supported his views with copious textual references. The excerpts from this book are in italics, and those interested may refer to this book for further information.

The article on Rāmānujāchārya is being reprinted as it was. In the article on Madhvāchārya, there are some areas where Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao differed from other people. He

had published in 1968 a well researched book on Madhvāchārya, named Poorna-Prajna Prashasti, in Kannada. We have added some material from this book also. This book is also being reprinted soon. Some matter has also been taken from the paper that he presented at a seminar on “Relevance of Dvaita Vedanta in the contemporary world” in 1986 organised by the Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation.

The attractive cover was designed by Sri J. A. Maitreya, the grandson of Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao who is ever willing to help us in every way. We thank him sincerely. We also extend our thanks to Sri Raghu of Vagartha Printers who has printed the books so neatly.

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Śaṅkarāchārya

A Giant Among Thinkers



Of the thinkers and religious leaders of our country, Śaṅkarāchārya is undoubtedly the most eminent, and also the most remarkable. For over a thousand years his name has been firm in our memory.

Hundreds of brilliant minds have since strode across the field of Indian thought, but none so impressive, or so disconcerting as Śaṅkara. He is easily the best mind India has produced in two thousand years.

Although strong sectarian prejudices, both in favour of him and against him, have rather dimmed and distorted his significance to an extent, he still stands out as an unchallenged celebrity. Those who worship him as a god and those who abhor him as a demon, are alike unable to shake him off. Those who follow him as well as those who attack him recognise that it was his versatile mind that provided the stimulus as well as the challenge.

In fact, there is in all Europe or Asia hardly a philosopher who could be mentioned with Śaṅkara in the same breath. He glitters without a peer in the galaxy of the most eminent thinkers of the world.

However, Śaṅkara is one of the most misunderstood thinkers of India. Later writers claiming to be his followers have misrepresented him, and his critics have damned him relying

almost entirely on these later writers. Padmapāda's Pañchapādikā (and the glosses over it), Vimuktātman's Ishtasiddhi and to an extent Vāchaspati's Bhāmatī have been responsible for the presentation of Śaṅkara's thought which was attacked by Rāmānuja and Madhva. Had these āchāryas confined their attention to Śaṅkara's own writings, much of the controversy would certainly have been avoided, and sectarian differences would greatly have been minimized.

It is remarkable that despite frequent suggestions over centuries that Śaṅkara might have been misrepresented, inquiry into what may have been his original thought has not seriously been made. During my study of the classical Advaita texts in the traditional manner which commenced in my teens and went on for nearly two decades, it became amply evident to me that there were almost irreconcilable differences among the later exponents of Śaṅkara, principally Vāchaspati-miśra (author of Bhāmatī), Padmapāda (author of Pañchapādikā, the source material for the Vivaraṇa school) and Sureśvara (author of Naishkarmya-siddhi and the Vārttikas). There are thoughts

in works like Vedānta-siddhānta-muktāvalī, Ishṭasiddhi, Chitsukhī and Pañchadasī, which are blatantly contrary to the ideas that could be found in Śaṅkara's own works (his Bhāshyas).

WHO WAS ŚAṅKARA ?

The date of Śaṅkara has for long been a subject for academic discussion.

The details concerning important events in the master's life (like parents, nativity, education, monastic ordination, travel, writings, disputations and death) are so hopelessly various and conflicting that we cannot take them seriously.

The only details that we can reasonably assume as reflecting a persistent tradition is that he hailed from Kerala in the South, that he became proficient in all the philosophical disciplines in vogue at that time at an early age, that he traveled all over the country as a wandering ascetic (sannyāsin), that he wrote works purporting to explain the true import of the Vedāntic lore, and that he passed away at an early age.

His own works, as also the works of his direct disciples, are altogether silent about his life. They do not even mention the name of his teacher, which the legendary accounts give as Govinda. The identification of this Govinda is also vague: he is variously described as a Vedāntin, a tāntrik, a siddha, a yogi, an alchemist and a hermit. He is mentioned in the legendary accounts as a disciple of Gauḍapāda, whose identification again has been uncertain and conflicting.

ŚAṅKARA'S DATE

The probable date of Śaṅkara has been the subject of considerable controversy. Ignoring the attempts to push his date back to the centuries before Christ (e.g. 44-12 B.C. according to the Śṛṅgeri pontifical reckoning), we may reasonably settle down to five or six centuries after Christ till the eighth century as the probable period. Scholars have adduced various evidences for various datings of Śaṅkara, but they are not conclusive.

Difficulties arise because internal evidences are all too meagre. Śaṅkara mentions the names of some kings quite casually, and in a manner that it

is doubtful if they were names of kings that actually existed. The names are common ones, and no further information is forthcoming. And he has not made reference to any historical event, or any dynasty or any city that may suggest an important clue. Nor does the style of his writing suggest any date.

But there are some references to earlier thinkers which may be valuable to ascertain the probable period in which he lived. He quotes a half-verse (Kārikā) from Ālambana-parīkṣā, a work of the celebrated Buddhist logician from Kāñchīpuram, viz. Diñnāga (VSB, 2,2,28). Vedānta sūtra bhāṣya. Thus he is in any case later than Diñnāga. And Diñnāga's date has been more or less definitely fixed: about 480 A.D. He also cites another Buddhist philosopher, Dharmakīrti, also from South India, the author of Pramāṇa-Vārttika. His direct disciple Sureśvara also quotes Dharmakīrti, by name (BUV, 4,37,53). Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad-Vārttika.

There are two references to a ruler Pūrṇavarman by Śaṅkara (VSB, 2, 1, 8 and 4, 2, 5); and Hiuen-tsāng, the Chinese traveller who visited Magadha (637-638 A.D.) speaks of Pūrṇavarman, who was not alive then.

The Chinese pilgrim I-tsing who visited India during 671-695 A.D. mentions Dharmakīrti, who was not mentioned by Hiuen-tsāng who had come here around 630 A.D. Thus Dharmakīrti's date may be around 650 A.D. Thus Śaṅkara and Sureśvara must have lived some time after Dharmakīrti, if indeed they were not his junior contemporaries.

It may thus be reasonably assumed that he lived some time between 650 and 840 A.D.

It is likely that he was nearer Dharmakīrti than Vāchaspati. Dharmakīrti, who was the pupil of Dharmapāla at Nālandā, was a nephew of the famous Mīmāṃsaka writer Kumārila-bhaṭṭa, according to the Tibetan sources. And the Indian tradition makes Śaṅkara a junior contemporary of Kumārila. The date suggested by T.R. Chintamani, viz. 632-664 A.D. appears to be nearest to the most probable period of Śaṅkara's life.

But we have to reckon with another baffling factor. Vidyānanda-Pātrakesarin (around 800 A.D.), the logician of the Digambara persuasion, who in his Ashṭa-sāhasrī mentions several eminent

thinkers like Diṇṇāga, Uddyotakara, Dharmakīrti, Kumārila and Prabhākara, does not mention Śaṅkara; similar is the case with Prabhāchandra (around 825 A.D.) who in his Prameya-kamala-mārtaṇḍa, mentions besides those mentioned by Vidyānanda, others like Bhagavān Upavarṣa (whom Śaṅkara also cites) but not Śaṅkara.

The important point to bear in mind is that due to some uncertain circumstance, Śaṅkara's own works did not for several centuries enjoy the popularity they merited. He does not seem to have been a celebrity until his teachings were criticized and attacked. The Chinese traveler I-tsing resided in Nālandā for ten years (675-685 A.D.); but he had not heard of Śaṅkara, who must have died about a decade earlier. The Rāṣṭrakūṭa monarchs, who rose to great political power in South India around 730 A.D. and did much to revive Hinduism for a period of more than two centuries, have left behind numerous inscriptions and monuments; but we have no evidence that they were acquainted with Śaṅkara, his work, or his monastic institutions (if indeed he had established them).

It is thus likely that Śaṅkara, far from being the great celebrity that he is now, was almost unknown during his days and for a couple of centuries later. He must have been a quiet scholar, shunning publicity, and engaged in study and writing throughout his brief life. His reinterpretation of the Vedāntic tradition was doubtless of great import: but it had to wait to be discovered long after he passed away. But once discovered, it immediately caught the imagination of the people; and Śaṅkara was hailed as an āchārya, pushing into oblivion all the earlier thinkers of eminence.

A cult must have subsequently grown up around the image of the āchārya as the one responsible for the intellectual resuscitation of the correct Vedāntic tradition.

DID ŚAṅKARA ESTABLISH ANY MATHAS ?

While it is doubtful if he ever founded any monastic organization, it is certain that none of the monastic institutions that bear his name goes back beyond the twelfth or thirteenth century, i.e. at least five or six centuries after the master's days.

The few institutions that have been rather loud in their claim have managed to spread a feeling among the populace that they are the real representatives of the great master and authentic exponents of his teaching.

Monastic institutions owing allegiance to him probably were founded several centuries later, in order to propagate his teachings. It is instructive to note that in the Śringeri pontifical list, Sureśvara, the immediate disciple-successor of Śaṅkara in this pontificate (as also claimed by Dvārakā and Kāñchi-Kāmakoti pontificates), is made to live and continue on the pontifical seat for about 800 years ! This would probably mean that the actual founding of the pontificate was 800 years later.

HIS MISSION

The mission in Śaṅkara's life appears to have been to combat the unhealthy influences of the decadent but wide-spread Mahāyāna Buddhism on the one hand and of the Mīmāṃsaka materialism on the other. The latter was the more formidable challenge; for Buddhism by then was already a spent force in the Indian mainland.

Śaṅkara's senior contemporary, Kumārila-bhaṭṭa, himself a Mīmāṃsaka, confessed in his Śloka-vārttika that Mīmāṃsakas generally had made Mīmāṃsa a materialistic creed (mīmāṃsa loke lokāyatikṛta), and that he was trying to give it a spiritual bias. It is obvious that Kumārila's efforts met with little success: his suicide is a significant clue. Śaṅkara undertook to complete his work, and in so doing found it necessary or convenient to relegate Mīmāṃsa to an inferior position.

The spirit of the times called for the revival of the ancient Upanishadic religion with its emphasis on the saving knowledge rather than on rituals and sacrifice, on the spirit within rather than on the gods above, and on withdrawal from active life rather than on involvement in it.

Śaṅkara does not claim to be an original thinker. As a commentator (bhāshya-kāra), the task that he undertook to accomplish was only to restore the correct interpretation of the Vedāntic tradition, as contained in the Vedānta-sūtra (which in its turn had attempted to define the philosophy of the Upanishads). Nevertheless, the significance of his commentary on the Vedānta-sūtra (Brahma-

sūtra-bhāshya) is not exhausted in mere interpretation or reinterpretation of a traditional text. It marked the beginning of a new line of thought.

His Brahma-sūtra-bhāshya is in this sense a truly original contribution to Indian thought. Many an idea that was already in vogue during his days (like Brahman, māyā, avidyā, adhyāsa, jñāna, and even mukti) acquired in this work a deeper significance, a wider context and a greater relevance. He made the philosophy of the Upanishads more meaningful, more rational and more practical. He rendered the Vedāntic tradition acceptable to diverse temperaments by providing an inclusive and profound base for it. The purpose of the Vedānta-sūtras, according to him, was to string together (sūtra) the Upanishadic passages that enlighten us on the unitary nature of the Self (the embodied and the supreme), so that the irritating worldly involvement may cease. He makes it clear that Bādarāyaṇa's text is in fact an authoritative philosophy of the Upanishads. He identifies himself with the 'votaries of the Upanishads' (aupanishada). He isolates the Upanishadic portion of the Vedic lore from the rest

of that lore, and narrows down scriptural authority to these ten or twelve Upanishadic texts. (on which commentaries ascribed to him are extant). He does not, as Rāmānuja does, extend the scope of authoritative scripture to include the ritualistic portions of the Veda, much less to include, as Madhva does, other auxiliary literature like the Smṛtis, Purāṇas and epics. He relies exclusively on the authority of the authentic Upanishads.

To accomplish this task, Śaṅkara adopted interesting methods, which time proved effective. He began by furnishing the old traditional texts such as the Upanishads and the Brahma-sūtra with a new synthetic interpretation; he projected a point of view acceptable alike to diverse creeds, both orthodox and heterodox.

It is not sufficiently recognised that Advaita, the system of thought that is exclusively linked up with his name, is not only a point of view but a method of interpretation. We see this method forcefully employed and clearly illustrated in his works.

Not that he had no forerunners in the Advaita point of view. In fact, we know of several of them,

such as Bhāskara, Brahmanandin, Upavarṣa and Bhartrihari, not to mention Gauḍapāda, with whom Śaṅkara was connected in the line of succession. But they all lacked Śaṅkara's comprehensive approach and expositional skill.

Among the numerous works ascribed to him, nearly two hundred including commentaries, polemical works and hymnal pieces, only his commentaries on ten Upanishads, on the Gītā and on the Brahma-sūtra appear to be his own. In any case, these are the works that have always been regarded as his most important works. The three are together known as Prasthāna-traya or Three-fold Foundation. And Śaṅkara regarding them as such provided the model for all subsequent commentators.

He writes in chaste Sanskrit, often simple although occasionally ornate and embellished; and his style is clear and forceful. Prose writing in classical Sanskrit may be said to have matured with Śaṅkara. Although the subject-matter is philosophical, literary flourishes are not infrequent. One can read him with pleasure.

Formulation of the essential framework of the philosophical system which the world knows as Advaita was his principal aim in these writings. It should, however, be recognised that he only provided the framework: the details were worked out, new directions were given (at times very different from the direction indicated by Śaṅkara), and implications spelt out by his annotators like Sureśvara, Padmapāda, Vāchaspati and Chitsukha.

As a matter of fact, Advaita is a loose expression comprehending diverse, and sometimes contradictory, viewpoints up-held by post-Śaṅkara writers who subscribed only generally to the framework supplied by Śaṅkara. As it happens in any system, Śaṅkara threw out numerous suggestions for posterity to work out.

Many ideas (like mūla-avidyā, vivarta, mahāvākya, six-fold pramāṇa, avidyā-leśa) which are now major details of Advaita cannot be found in Śaṅkara's own writings. They belong to the development of thought that is post-Śaṅkara. There is a need to examine whether these ideas were necessary to explain some basic conceptions of Śaṅkara, or have served to camouflage and distort

the original thought. Did Śaṅkara really dismiss the world as an illusion ? We do not find evidence for it in Vedānta-sūtra-bhāṣhya at any rate. However, those who claimed to be his successors forgot the significance of his thought, or found that his mission was unpractical, and sought to reconcile Vedānta with Mīmāṃsā. They compromised the liberating wisdom with the performance of rituals.

The sect that got formed at a later date with the image of Śaṅkara as the rallying force came to be distinguished by the very ideology that Śaṅkara strove to extinguish: the amalgamation of rituals with wisdom (jñāna-karma-samucchaya). It inclined more in favour of the Mīmāṃsā position with regard to Scriptural authority and the value of rituals than with the 'Vedānta' as envisaged by Bādarāyaṇa and Śaṅkara. There was thus an obvious disparity between the Advaita theory that Śaṅkara expounded and the actual religious practices of not only the laymen but even the elite in the sect.

It was but natural that persistent efforts were made to tone down the rigour of Śaṅkara's standpoint by subsequent writers. The numerous sub-commentaries and glosses that came to be

written on Śaṅkara's works reflect the spirit of accommodation of a ritualistic attitude with the monistic inclination of the master. The result was a distortion of Śaṅkara's position, thus opening him to unjust attacks by 'rival' schools of Vedānta. It is an uncomfortable realization when we find that the philosophical position of Śaṅkara that Bhāskara, Rāmānuja and Madhva attacked is what was foisted on Śaṅkara at a later date, and not what can be substantiated by his own writings !

HIS WORKS

The disability under which the celebrated authors in ancient India suffered was the spurious ascription of works by later and lesser writers to them. More than 250 works have been popular in the country as compositions of Śaṅkara: metaphysical treatises in the nature of commentaries on scriptural texts (bhāṣhya), minor dissertations (prakaraṇas), philosophical poems, hymns to divinities (stotras) and advices to spiritual aspirants (upadeśa). Many of these works are of considerable literary excellence, and merit the popularity they enjoy. The devotional hymns especially are of undoubted charm, and would bring credit to whoever was their author.

But the contents betray the fact that all of them cannot be the works of the same author. The views expressed in the various works are not only various but frequently inconsistent and contradictory. Many of the ideas contained in them are decidedly of a date much later than Śaṅkara's. It is obvious that these works are by different authors, and were composed at different periods.

The widespread belief that they are all Śaṅkara's was in part due to a series of 20 volumes entitled "The works of Śaṅkara" (Śaṅkara-granthāvalih), published by the Vāṇi-Vilās Press, Śrīraṅgam, during the early years of the twentieth century. The publisher's venture had the seal of approval by the then pontiff of Śrīṅgeri, Sri Sacchidānanda-Śivābhinava-Nṛsimha-bhāratī Swāmi. But we are not told what methods were employed to ascertain the veracity of the claim that all these works were Śaṅkara's. The volumes were no doubt excellent productions, and the publisher brought them out as an act of devotion. There is no doubt that the publisher was a pious, sincere and well-meaning admirer of Śaṅkara, but inadvertently an untruth was set afoot by him. A false tradition of Śaṅkara's authorship of disparate and obviously spurious works has continued since then.

The first twelve volumes contained the major works of Śaṅkara-the commentaries on the Brahma-Sūtras, the Upanishads and the Gītā (conventionally called the Prasthāna-traya). The next sixteen volumes contained 35 minor dissertations (Prakaraṇas) on mainly philosophical themes. This was followed by two volumes containing a large number of devotional hymns (stotras) addressed to various divinities like Gaṇapati, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī and Subrahmanya. Here was also included a commentary (bhāshya) on an earlier work (Lalitā-trīsatī). The last two volumes contained a Tāntrik work called Prapañcha-sāra.

It is to be noted that Śaṅkara has rejected in so many words the Tāntrik approach and the worship of Gaṇapati, Devī and so on as tāmasik and therefore as unvedic. For instance, in his Gītā-bhāshya, (9, 25 and 17, 4) we read भूतानि विनायकमातृगणचतुर्भगिन्यादीनि यान्ति भूतेज्याः । And भूतगणांश्च सप्तमातृकादींश्च अन्ये यजन्ते तामसा जनाः ।

The claim that all these were works of Śaṅkara was not accepted even in the orthodox circles of those days. There were serious doubts cast on Lalitā-trīsatī-bhāshya and Prapañcha-sāra,

which are, to say the least, antagonistic to the spirit of Vedānta. And scholarly tradition has all along ignored all these works, with the exception of his commentaries on the Prasthāna-traya.

Besides these, there are other works commonly ascribed to Śaṅkara. Saundarya-laharī is the most prominent among them. This is a Tāntrik work, but Śaṅkara has very little use for Tāntrik ideas in the major works (the bhāshyas), ascribed to him with greater justification. He does not appear to be even sympathetic to the Tāntrik conceptions or practices. The attribution of Śrī-chakra worship to Śaṅkara (in some of the pontificates such as Śṛṅgeri and Kāñchi- Kāmakōṭi, and in some temples like Mūkāmbikā at Kollūr) is likewise an error. A commentary on Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma, a popular hymnal sequence, is also ascribed to his authorship. But the work is of a different quality that it would be altogether unfair to associate Śaṅkara's name with it; and it is decidedly a recent work.

ŚAṅKARA AND BUDDHISM

Śaṅkara, in popular imagination, was the hero of Hinduism who drove Buddhism out of India.

This is altogether inaccurate. Historically, Buddhism had lost its vigour a couple of centuries before the emergence of Śaṅkara, and had already moved into the Himalayan neighbourhood. The battle that Śaṅkara was obliged to fight against the Buddhist schools (like Mādhyamika and Vaibhāshika) was purely metaphysical and doctrinal, and not religious. And Buddhism (mahāyāna) itself had moved closer to the Upanishads (which in fact was the source from which Buddhism took shape), and the chasm that yawned between Buddhism and Vedānta was indeed narrow and negligible.

WAS ŚAṅKARA A ŚAIVITE ?

The present-day followers of Śaṅkara in South India have Śaivite leanings, and they worship Śiva in the form of līṅga in common with another sect, the Vīraśaivas, whose relation to Vedic tradition is uncertain, if not decidedly rebellious. Śaṅkara's present-day followers, therefore, seek to affiliate Śaṅkara with Śiva. The inspiration for this has been given by the passages in Śaivite purāṇas and in the legendary accounts of Śaṅkara's life, all of which date later than the twelfth century.

But Śaṅkara's own writings (viz. the Bhāshyas) do not give any evidence of his Śaivite leanings. On the other hand, there are clear indications that he was a votary of Viṣṇu, as were his direct disciples, Sureśvara and Padmapāda.

Besides the inspiration that he provided for philosophers in this country, he appears to have attempted to usher in several new institutions in society. Asceticism was not unknown, nor was a renunciant's way of life. Jainism had made the former popular, while Buddhism had made the later come to stay. Śaṅkara saw the merits in both. But the traditional Mīmāṃsakas insisted that a householder's life was the only worthwhile and approved mode (aikāśramya), and came down heavily on both ascetics and renunciants.

Śaṅkara himself had become an ascetic and a renunciant, and must have suffered considerably on this account. The extant Śaṅkara-Vijayas do contain clues to this. But after Śaṅkara, samnyāsa became an accepted, nay honoured, mode of life. That it involved a total rejection of caste and rituals did not seriously upset the orthodox folk !

But Śaṅkara's own writings (viz. the Bhāshyas) do not give any evidence of his Śaivite leanings. On the other hand, there are clear indications that he was a votary of Viṣṇu, as were his direct disciples, Sureśvara and Padmapāda.

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Samnyāsa thus became a new and purposeful institution within the pale of traditional society, with its own roles and responsibilities. Śaṅkara held that it was possible for an individual to attain liberation while he still lived (jīvanmukti), and a samnyāsin prepared himself for this great event. Mukti or emancipation is not necessarily a posthumous state; it can be a reality even in the work-a-day world while the individual retained his belongingness to the society. This was doubtless a powerful idea, and a bold one at that. The folk addiction to heaven received a severe jolt, for the first time in India's history.

Here then was a brilliant thinker who was also dynamic and versatile. He felt committed to tradition and fought to revive; but he had the wisdom to perceive the changing needs and the boldness to innovate and reform. He found our religion in shambles, our philosophy in a quandary, and our society in distress; and he left all three clear and secure, energetic and onward-moving, chastened and keyed to higher values. Thanks to him, we could hold our ground and push ahead.



Rāmānuja

The Teacher and Reformer



In South Indian temples of the Vaiṣṇava persuasion there is a daily function, known as Sattumurai, during which those assembled, both priests and laymen, shout with fervour— “May the magnificent command of Rāmānuja grow, and grow for ever !”

This command, given nearly nine hundred years ago, has indeed grown to great proportions. Not only is Rāmānuja the accredited master of large masses of devotees in the South, he has also inspired the religious movement in the north during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The impact of his personality and the benefits of his teachings have been widespread in the country.

Rāmānuja (1017-1137) was born in Sriperumbudūr near Kāñchīpuram, and was trained by his maternal uncle, Tirumalai-Nambi, in the spiritual lore. Later Rāmānuja (known during his early years as Lakṣmaṇa Suri) studied the Vedāntic texts under Yādavaprakāśa, who was a protagonist of the severely monistic viewpoint. He fell out with his teacher and lived for a while as an independent scholar.

The Vaiṣṇava community in Śrīraṅgam was at this time in a quandary. Yamuna, who was the mentor of Rāmānuja's uncle, Tirumalai-Nambi, and who guided this community for long years, had now grown old and was looking for a successor.

He pinned his hope on Rāmānuja who was residing at this time in Kāñchīpuram, and sent his student Periya-Nambi to fetch Rāmānuja to Śrīraṅgam. But before Rāmānuja could reach Śrīraṅgam, Yamuna breathed his last and the disappointed Rāmānuja returned to Kāñchīpuram. Periya-Nambi, too, went with him and taught him the details of the Viśiṣṭa-dvaita metaphysics.

Rāmānuja, in the meantime, entered the monastic order, and a couple of months later he was invited again to lead the Srivaiṣṇava community in Śrīraṅgam. Rāmānuja agreed and went to the holy city, where he remained for sixty years guiding a hundred thousand householders, seven hundred religious teachers (jīyars) seventy-four leaders of the community (acharyapurushas), and a large group of priests (ekaṅgis). Placed in charge of the great Śrīraṅgam temple, he instituted several reforms in the administration and organised the temple rituals.

About 1074, Rāja Rāja Kulottunga Chola, the fanatical Śaiva emperor of Tamilnad, launched a terrible persecution of the Vaiṣṇava leaders and ordered the arrest of Rāmānuja. Implored by his

followers, Rāmānuja fled the country in disguise and entered Mysore. He passed through Sāligrāma and Tondanūr before he arrived in Yadugiri (or Melukote).

Here he is said to have converted the Hoysala King Bittideva, a Jain, to the Vaiṣṇava fold, and obtained royal patronage for his followers. He is supposed to have lived on the Melukote hills for twelve years.

When the Chola emperor died. Rāmānuja returned to Tamilnad.

On his way back to Śrīraṅgam he visited the Tirumalai Hills and, with the help of the King of that area, Ghaṭṭiga-Yādavarāya, he brought about administrative changes in the temple there. It was Rāmānuja that introduced the Vaiṣṇava sectarian bias in the worship of Venkateśwara and the township of Tirupati was founded by him.

Returning to Śrīraṅgam he spent the rest of his life there quietly, writing and preaching, organising and guiding the community. It was due to him that Śrīraṅgam became the Rome for Srivaiṣṇavas.

In the temple there his works are recited even as the Dharma-sūtras, Vedānta-sūtras and Mīmāṃsa-sūtras are recited. He is held in the highest esteem in the pantheon of Āchāryas and Alvars.

He was in fact the successor to a great tradition that dates back in its origin to the early centuries of the present era. The worship of Viṣṇu and the cult of devotion which form the foundation of the Bhāgavata school were popularised by a succession over several centuries of twelve eminent mystic poet-singers, known as Azhwars or those who were drowned in divine ecstasy, who hailed from different parts of the Tamil country.

They had composed religious hymns of high poetic quality in praise of Viṣṇu, and the collection of these hymns styled Prabaṇḍhas (compositions) includes four thousand pieces. This collection has been accorded the status of Vedic literature, and is described as the Dravidian Veda.

The custom of reciting these Tamil hymns in the temples during worship was an old one. Nāthamuni, who was born in 823 A.D., was

inspired to set these hymns to music when he heard in Kumbakonam the hymns (Pasurams) of Nammazhwar.

One of his disciples, Manakkal-Nambi, had Yamuna (or Alavandar) as his disciple; and Yamuna (917-1042) was a great scholar, poet, missionary and reformer. It was he who systematized the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and rendered Śrīraṅgam as the headquarters of the Srivaiṣṇava community.

Another great personality who contributed to the glory of this holy city, Azhwar-Tiruvaraṅgap-Perumal-Araiyaṛ, was Yamuna's son.

The teacher who initiated Rāmānuja into the mysteries of the Viśiṣṭādvaita point of view, Periya-Nambi, was Yamuna's disciple. Rāmānuja's uncle, Tirumalai-Nambi, was another disciple of Yamuna. Rāmānuja is said to have learnt the esoteric meaning of Rāmāyana from this Tirumalai-Nambi on the Tirumalai Hills.

The philosophical viewpoint, celebrated today as Viśiṣṭādvaita, is the work of Nāthamuni,

Yamuna and Rāmānuja. Nāthamuni, who wrote Nyāyatattva and Yogarahasya, was greatly influenced by the devotional attitude of the Azhwars. Yamuna, the author of Siddhitraya, was also known for his religious fervour. The high tone of this devotional ecstasy entered into the making of Rāmānuja and coloured his metaphysics.

RĀMĀNUJA'S WORKS

Rāmānuja was a great writer, with a flair for argument and mastery over diction. He was not only erudite, but was an original thinker. His commentary on the Brahmasūtra, celebrated as Sribhāshya, is a monument of learning and dialectical skill. His Vedāntasāra, Vedāntadīpa and Vedārtha-samgraha are fine specimens of philosophical writing.

His three prose pieces (Gadyatraya) in praise of Śrīraṅganātha, ecstatic surrender, and Vaikunṭha are charming and tender, forceful and serene. Besides these, he commented on the Bhagavad-Gītā and prepared a manual for worship (Nitya).

He was known to his contemporaries as 'Master' (Udaiyavar) and had several eminent

disciples, of whom Kurattazhwar was the foremost. However, he predeceased Rāmānuja, and his son Parasara-Bhatta assumed leadership of the Srivaiṣṇava community in Śrīraṅgam after Rāmānuja passed away.

This Parasara was a great scholar, and did much to spread the new cult. Rāmānuja had also appointed seventy-two pontiffs (Simhasanadhipatis) with powers to receive people into the Srivaiṣṇava fold and initiate them into the esoteric aspects of religion. The organization of the community was due to them.

LIBERAL OUTLOOK

More than metaphysical brilliance, sympathy for the downtrodden masses characterised the mission of Rāmānuja. Devotion to Godhead knows no caste barriers, and a truly religious person is free from prejudices of caste, creed and status.

Among the great Azhwars Tiruppan was an outcaste, Tirumaṅgal was a hunter, Nammalvar a Vellala, Tirumalisai's caste was unknown; and they are all revered as saints and their songs are sung by the most orthodox among the Srivaiṣṇavas during the serenest moments of daily worship.

Rāmānuja inherited this attitude and for him caste distinctions were more man-made than natural. He admitted to his presence who ever was a devotee and an aspirant and gave initiation to him regardless of the caste to which he belonged. He arranged to admit occasionally the outcastes and low-castes into the holy precincts of the celebrated shrines. He raised the caste status of numerous groups, and preached that all alike were entitled to surrender to God-head and get emancipated.

It is significant that he designated the outcastes 'blessed castes' (Tirukkulattar), anticipating the more recent title of 'Harijans'.

Thanks to his sympathetic understanding, numerous castes of inferior social status got access to the religious lore and shared the social privileges of the Śrivaishṇavas. Rāmānuja was pre-eminent as a social reformer, as a friend of the down-trodden.



Madhvāchārya

The Giant of The Coast



Stone Image of Madhwacharya
Ananteshwara Temple, Udupi

The heroic Paraśurāma is said to have reclaimed from sea the coastal strip, bounded by the Western Ghat's, and styled as the "Seven Konkans" including the Tulu country and Kerala.

In this land of Paraśurāma from time immemorial has persisted a culture that is at once

unique and intriguingly original. This culture, even today, is predominantly religious; and the religion here is occult and esoteric.

It is a quaint concoction of animism and witchcraft, magic rites and dance rituals, suggesting primitive survival but with an unmistakable streak of intellectual excellence.

The religion there today is by no means barbaric; beliefs are tempered by rationalistic devotion and the cult of aryan gods has taken deep roots. Among the influences that prevented this culture from sinking into savagery was the personality of Madhva who in the thirteenth century, performed almost a miracle in this land.

Madhva (1238-1318) was born in the neighbourhood of the present-day Udipi in South Kanara and spent the major portion of his life in that coastal region, although he undertook two tours in North India and went up to Badari in the Himalayas.

He was exceptionally gifted with dialectical skill, and his uncommon intelligence was

recognised all over the country, early in his life. He wrote in all 37 works, some of which are monuments of erudition and created a stir in the scholarly world of the day. His commentarial tracts were sharply directed against the non-dualistic idealism of Śaṅkara.

The historical or sociological explanation of Madhva's antagonism to Śaṅkara, which was not merely intellectual but emotional as well, is not forth-coming. But the creed and the sect that were instituted by Madhva were severely contrary to those for which Śaṅkara was directly or indirectly responsible.

REALIST

Madhva was an uncompromising realist: the world for him was no illusion, the individual self was in no sense identical with the absolute Godhead, and Viṣṇu was the highest in the hierarchy of realities. Emerging out of this philosophical position, the sect that he founded, which now has spread all over South India, had a definite Vaiṣṇava bias: the religion became intensely devotional and practical.

Śaṅkara had emphasised wisdom, and Rāmānuja devotion. It remained for the third Āchārya to synthesise the two approaches. Madhva explained the relative significance of each and their interrelatedness.

He eschewed ritualistic pre-occupations, and deprecated at the same time intellectual brow-beating. The heart and the head weighed equally with him. The practical religion that stemmed out of his teachings reflects this judicious combination.

His youth and middle age glowed with an evangelic fervour; he moved about the whole country, argued with the learned, vanquished the opponents, converted them to his own creed, and organised a sect that was all his own.

Beyond doubt his personality was forceful and left an indelible impression on his followers. The Vaiṣṇava sect was not only inspired by him, but it is sustained by an unceasing glorification of his personality.

Later in life, however, his fervour for proselytization waned, and he settled down in his home-town to transform the religion and social life

of his own Tulu brethren from a state of superstitious backwardness to a new era of reason, critical evaluation and syncretic reorganisation.

This was indeed a remarkable achievement: he was almost solely responsible for the refinement and progress of the Tulu folk. His unfinished work was completed later by Vādirāja, another great son of the soil. In the cultural history of the two Kanaras, the names of Madhva and Vādirāja stand unrivalled as benefactors.

Madhva's influence extended even to Goa, which he visited more than once, and to the northern parts of Kerala. In due course, his teachings made an impact on the Gauḍīya sect in Bengal. His followers are today to be found in large numbers in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu.

The philosophical literature in India is heavily indebted to Madhva and his early protagonists; they created an intellectual revolution and contributed to a religious revival in South India.

MADHVĀCHĀRYA AND UDIPI

The name of Madhva is associated with the famous Kṛṣṇa shrine in Udupi, which he is said to

have installed about 1277. However, this tradition is not supported by inscriptions, and the earliest extant account of Madhva's life (Anumadhva-charita by Hriṣikeśa Tīrtha) is silent on this issue.

The Madhva Vijaya recounts that after returning from his travels in north India for the first time, Madhavāchārya founded the Kṛṣṇa temple in Udipi (madhva-vijaya. 9, 41-42). What we understand after reading this account is that Madhvāchārya brought out the idol of Sri Kṛṣṇa from the lake and consecrated this in a temple. It is not apparent from where arose the popular belief that the idol of Kṛṣṇa was found in a piece of gopi-chandana by Madhvāchārya. The Vāyustuti of Trivikrama-panditāchārya does not mention anywhere that Madhvacharya consecrated the Kṛṣṇa idol in the temple in Udupi. But there is no mention of there being a Kṛṣṇa temple in Udupi prior to the time of Madavāchārya.

From the view of iconography, there seems to be a great deal of resemblance between the Kṛṣṇa idol in the Udupi temple and Kṛṣṇa idols found elsewhere in the same area. The Kṛṣṇa idols found in this area are unique, and very different from

Kṛṣṇa idols found elsewhere in India, and are not as prescribed in the Śilpa texts. Surprisingly the idol of Kuvalanātha (or Kuvaleśvara) found in a Jain basti in Goa (Ancient Shrines of Goa, a pictorial survey, published by Govt. of Goa, 1965 picture 58) bears a striking resemblance to the Kṛṣṇa image in Udupi. From the historical standpoint, it is not unlikely that even as the Ananteśvara temple in Udupi was once the Jain basti of Anantanātha tīrthankara, the Kṛṣṇa temple may also have been a Jain basti.

It may also be likely that as Kṛṣṇa was the cousin of the 22th Jain Tīrthankara Neminātha (Ariṣṭanemi), the Jains might have installed the idol of Sri Kṛṣṇa in their basti and worshipped him.

The architectural examination of this temple as well as the Ananteśvara temple (with which Madhva throughout his life was intimately connected) suggest that they were originally Jaina sanctuaries converted as Śaiva shrines probably in the wake of Śaṅkara's visit to Kollūr and other places in the Tulu country. Devil-worship and spiritism had continued through these changes.

To this composite culture of aboriginal beliefs, Jainism, Śaivism, mother-goddess cult and fertility rites Madhva added the Bhāgavata outlook; and the Kṛṣṇa shrine in Udipi stands as a monument to this crowning reformation undertaken by Madhva. It was the centre from which the new culture got diffused all over the coastal strip and beyond.

Madhva's organization skill was considerable. He had brought many changes in social and religious life of the Tulu people.

THE PARYĀYA TRADITION

It is commonly believed that the custom of paryāya being done alternately by eight maṭhas was founded by Madhvāchārya himself. However neither the Madhva Vijaya nor the Sampradāya paddhati written by Madhvāchārya's own disciple Hṛṣikeśa-tīrtha mention anything about the paryāya tradition or about the eight maṭhas. The Madhva vijaya only praises the scholarship, etc of the eight monks. The entire notion that Madhvāchārya founded eight maṭhas, and that he organized the periodical worship by the āchāryas of the eight maṭhas is not entirely substantiated

historically. The prevailing belief is that it was Vādirājāchārya who was responsible for reorganizing the paryāya to be conducted every two years successively by the eight maṭhas. However it is not unlikely that it was Vādirājāchārya who founded the entire tradition of the paryāya.

Madhvāchārya also made an arrangement by which means the pontificate became interdependent: he thus minimised tensions and bickerings among these religious institutions which were also in charge of secular matters.

The role of these monastic institutions in stabilising the Tulu society by redintegrative processes and educational activities has been unmistakably great. Even in this task, Madhva had his brilliant successor in Vādirāja.

Besides these coastal pontificates, Madhva was responsible for three other pontificates on the plains, known as Uttaradi Muṭṭ, Rāghavendra Swāmi Muṭṭ and Vyāsarāya Muṭṭ. These Muṭṭs have done much to propagate Madhva's teachings by disputations and publications.

The immediate disciples of Madhva, Padmanābha Tīrtha and Narahari Tīrtha were scholars from the Telugu country on the banks of Godavari, and wielded enormous influence: the latter was a Minister of State in the Kalinga Kingdom even after he became a monk. Thanks to them, the Madhva sect obtained a firm foothold on this side of the Western Ghats.

The Madhva sect is celebrated for its devotional approach to Godhead. It is no accident that the Dāsa cult (led by Vyāsa Tīrtha, Purandaradāsa, Kanakadāsa and Vijayadāsa) developed only within this sect.

REFORMER

The Haridāsas of Karnataka popularised the main tenets of the Madhva sect as travelling minstrels and God-intoxicated saints: they brought into being in Kannada a rich body of philosophical writings for the benefit of the laity.

It is thus that Karnataka for over five hundred years has been the headquarters of Madhvaism in the country; and Kannada has remained the official language of the Madhvas wherever they be.

As a brilliant writer of philosophical tracts, as a skilful dialectician, as a zealous reformer, and as an organiser with vision and tact Madhva has claims on our admiration. His followers regard him as an incarnation of Hanuman and of Bhīma. Like them, he too was an instrument of divine will and, like them again, his achievements were remarkable.

Judged from his achievements, his personality must have been robust and domineering; and courage must have been the outstanding trait of his character.

Unflinching devotion, utter sincerity, intellectual alertness, and indefatigable fortitude marked the man who moved a whole people to better states of civilization.



Madhvāchārya's Philosophy

The system of Vedānta now known as Dvaita was described by Madhva himself as "Tattva-vāda". Tattva means reality, characterized by existence in its own right (sattā), activity (pravṛtti) and knowledge (pramiti), and Madhva recognizes only two orders of reality: the source or independent (svatantra) and the derived or dependent (paratantra). That Madhva's concern was to examine the nature and dimension of reality is evident from the titles of many of his works (Tattva-sankhyāna, Tattvodyota, Tattva-viveka) and the works of his commentators (like Trivikrama's Tattva-pradīpa and Jayatīrtha's Tattva-prakāśikā). Vāda means a formal investigation with a view to ascertain the correctness of a position. The expression 'Tattva-vāda' thus signifies an effort to ascertain the real (tattva-nirṇaya). What resulted from this exercise was the conviction that Godhead (called Viṣṇu) alone was real in the full and right sense of the word; the world's reality was bracketed in it. Hence the name of one of the most valuable works of Madhva, Viṣṇu-tattva-vinirṇaya.

Madhva pointed out that the effort to ascertain reality must necessarily be free from prejudices and passions (rāga-dveṣa-rahita) and must be resorted to in the spirit of an austerity (tapas). He elevates the critical and intent study of scriptural texts (śāstrāvamarśana) to the level of upāsanā (-cf Tantra-sāra-sangraha, 135). The conventional sequence of “Śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana” has been reinterpreted by him as involving the clear and correct ascertainment of reality (samyang-niscita-tattva) followed by focused attention with devotion upon it (upāsanā or nididhyāsana). In ‘Anuvyākhyāna’, he argues that intuitive vision dawns consequent upon the indubitable ascertainment of reality.

असंशयेन तत्त्वस्य निर्णये ब्रह्मदर्शनम् ।

Ascertainment by rational procedures (Vāda) is distinguished by him (in his work, Kathā-lakshana) from arguments meant only to gain a point at all costs (jalpa) and attempts to defeat the opponent by means fair or foul (vitaṇḍā). This is a significant distinction in as much as he decries arguments for argument’s sake, or discussions on

trivial matters. The only issue of any significance for Madhva was the absolute, supreme and pervasive reality of Brahman (as Viṣṇu); and he directed all his energy and expended all his brilliance towards convincing all intelligent people about this.

Like his Kathā-lakṣhaṇa, his Pramāṇa-lakṣhaṇa also illustrates the most proper and effective methodology to be adopted for ascertaining the supreme reality of Brahman मानलक्षणमित्युक्तं संक्षेपाद-ब्रह्मसिद्धये । He acknowledges that he follows the model of Brahmatarka in this, a work, which unfortunately has now been lost. Madhva, and his early commentators (like Trivikrama, Padmanābha-tīrtha and Narahari-tīrtha (1324 A.D) confined their attention strictly to the employment of this methodology. The second phase in the development of the Dvaita system began with Jayatīrtha (1365-1388) whose great commentaries set aside as it were the earlier commentaries and initiated a new trend in argumentative methodology (especially in his Vādāvalī and Pramāṇa-paddhati). Polemical discussions became profuse during the subsequent phase. (Sripāda-rāja 1420-1486,

Vyāsa-rāja 1478-1539, the author of Nyāyāmṛta, Vādirāja, (1480-1600) author of Tarka-tāṇḍava, Vijayindra 1514-1595, Taraṅgini Rāmāchārya (1575-1640).

A study of Madhva's views concerning conventional rituals prescribed in the Mīmāṃsa texts and of his preference for contemplation upon Viṣṇu as the bīmba within oneself would be extremely interesting for those who are interested in sādhana. The former can be principally found in his Karma-nirṇaya (with Rāghavendra-tīrtha's gloss Bhāva-dīpa and Satyanantha-yeti's notes Prakāśa) and the latter in his Tantra-sāra-sangraha. Madhva interestingly reinterprets the idea of 'karma' ('duty' enjoined by scriptural texts) as action done without desires worldly or other-worldly, but only because of their character of being prescribed as 'duty', regardless of the benefits mentioned severally for such action. When done thus, he avers, the 'duty' helps purify the mind and make it eligible to receive the grace of God. He is further disinclined to treat the deities like Agni, Varuṇa, Asvins and Indra as independent benefactors, for whom the various 'karmas' of Pūrva-mīmāṃsā are meant.

For him, Viṣṇu is the only Godhead, and the numerous deities mentioned in the Vedic lore are only limited and projected expressions thereof. This position has been reinforced in his commentary on the Rīgvedic hymns (R̥gbhāshya, with Rāghavendra-tīrtha's gloss R̥g-artha-manjari), where he insists that the hundreds of deities mentioned in the Vedic texts are really so many names of one Godhead, viz. Viṣṇu.

Incidentally, Madhva is the only one among the three Āchāryas who attempted a formal interpretation of the Vedic Hymns. His R̥gbhāshya contains his comments upon 489 hymns belonging to the first three chapters of the first ashtaka of R̥gveda. He formulates here the view that each hymn admits of being interpreted at three levels: (a) the deities severally mentioned ("devata-paratvena"), (b) Viṣṇu as the inner essence and controller of all the several deities ("tadantaryāmi-viṣṇu paratvena") and (c) psychological symbolism ("adhyātma-paratvena") relevant for the sādḥaka. This three-tier interpretation appealed to Sri Aurobindo, and he has utilized this in his study of the Vedic gods. Madhva's contribution in this particular regard merits careful study.

The third level of interpretation has also been discussed in his Tantra-sāra-sangraha. He provides here the ideological background for the contemplation upon Viṣṇu as bimba. This is a remarkable text, which reveals his proficiency in yoga and tantra. Unfortunately, it has not received the attention that it merits. The approach of the haridāśas may be said to have been derived almost exclusively from this work, which reads like a manual entirely devoted to Upāsanā. Many kannada 'sulādīs' of Vijayadāsa and Jagannathadāsa's monumental work in Kannada, Harikathāmṛtasāra have crystallized this approach, which is the outstanding and unique contribution of the Dvaita system to Indian thought.

TANTRA-SĀRA-SANGRAHA

In some of the South Indian temples dedicated to Viṣṇu or Śiva, especially in the coastal regions of Karnāṭaka (South Kanara), worship is conducted according to Tantrasārāgama, which claims to belong to the Pāñcarātra division. The principal work of this Āgama that is available now is Tantra-sāra-sangraha, a short work of 400 verses in four

sections by Ānanda-tīrtha (Madhvācārya). The Vedāntic system that he expounded and the sect that he founded emphasize Viṣṇu as the supreme Deity, and prescribe worship of Viṣṇu as the major method of obtaining emancipation. Ānanda-tīrtha affiliated himself to the Vedic tradition, but counted among the authoritative texts Pāñcarātra :

ऋगादयश्चत्वारः पञ्चरात्रं च भारतम् ।

मूलरामायणं ब्रह्मसूत्रं मानं स्वतः स्मृतम् ॥

(Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya)

इत्येव श्रुतयोऽशेषाः पाञ्चरात्रमथाखिलम् ।

मूलरामायणं चैव भारतं स्मृतयोऽखिलाः ॥

वैष्णवानि पुराणानि सांख्ययोगौ परावपि ।

ब्रह्मतर्कश्च मीमांसेत्यन्तः शब्दसागरः ॥

अनन्ता युक्तयश्चैव प्रत्यक्षागममूलकाः ।

एतदेव च सच्छास्त्रं दुःशास्त्रं तु ततः परम् ॥

(Anu-vyākhyāna, 3,3,1)

While the general trend of Tantra-sārāgama appears to accord with the Pāñcarātra ideology there are many significant departures. Lakṣmī-tantra (24,11) holds that Brahman is actually Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇa ('Jyotis tat paramam brahma

lakṣmīnārāyaṇāh-vayam'), but Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha (4,106) insists that devotion to Viṣṇu (Brahman) should be supreme, and that worship of Lakṣmī should come later'. The four forms of the Deity (Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) are recognised (1,22-23) in Tantra-sārāgama and come frequently for worship but the vyūha ideology is entirely absent.

The role of initiation (dīkṣā) is mentioned only casually (as for instance in 2,10-11, 'pratimām śiṣyam eva ca', 'pratimāyām sannidhi-kṛccīṣye māhātmaya-kṛd bhavet'), and no definition, explanation or classification is attempted. Even the worship rituals prescribed here are simple, and no distinction is made between worship at home and worship in the temple, although there are details about the construction and consecration of temples and making of icons. The text declares rather remarkably that even if the actions prescribed in the Āgama are not performed, one would derive all the benefits and even more successfully by devoting himself to Viṣṇu with no motivations whatever (4,122)

अकुर्वद्भक्त्या भक्त्या निरपेक्षो भजन् हरिम् ।
सर्वमेतदवाप्नोति विशेषेण न संशयः ॥

Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha (1,67) mentions four methods of worship as leading to the obtainment of all the objectives of human existence (the puruṣārthas: virtuous life, wealth, worldly pleasures and salvation): (i) recitation and repetition of the mantras (japa), (ii) contemplation (dhyāna), (iii) fire-rituals (huta) and (iv) iconic worship (arcā).

जपध्यानहुतार्चादीनेवं यः कुरुते सदा ।
धर्मार्थकाममोक्षणां भाजनं स्यात्स एव हि ॥

And the text recognizes five 'seats' of the Deity where worship may be conducted : (i) maṇḍalas, (ii) iconic representations, (iii) one's own heart, (iv) sacred water-pot, or (v) mere platform or altar (1,46):

पूज्यद्भक्त्या भगवान्नित्यं चक्राब्जादिकमण्डले ।
चले वा हृदये वाऽपि जले वा केवलस्थले ॥

It is common knowledge that, in the contemporary world, rituals of the religious brand have become almost obsolete, not only in the

world at large but even in India. In this situation, to project the Vedic lore as replete with ritualistic prescriptions in a polytheistic context would not appeal to the modern mind. And the techniques of spiritual practice have undergone almost revolutionary changes during the last hundred years. The hold of tradition has weakened now, largely because tradition has been identified with superstitions, rituals and gross idolatry. It would certainly be heartwarming and refreshing to be told that Madhva looks upon rituals as symbolic, and suggests that true worship is internal (bimbopāsanā) and not external. Madhva approvingly quotes in Br̥hadbhāṣhya (3,5) a statement from Brahmāṇḍa to the effect that all scriptures are meant merely to inform about the Godhead which is the absolute and supreme reality (विष्णोः सर्वोत्तमस्य ज्ञानार्थे शास्त्रमिष्यते ।) and elsewhere (in Atharvaṇa-bhāṣhya, 4,1,1) another statement that the chief abode of Godhead (Viṣṇu) is verily the Viṭal Force of every individual (प्रधानं धाम विष्णोस्तु प्राण एव प्रकीर्तितः ।)

The concept of individual self (jīva) in this ideology involves the view, that the self (the nature

of which is extremely subtle) is pervaded and inspired only by Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) and his energy Lakṣmī (Rāmā). Lakṣmī enters into the self and inspires it because she is subtler than the self and Viṣṇu is subtler still and enters into and inspires Lakṣmī. Viṣṇu abides in every soul as its deity or principal factor (bimba-rūpa) and governs all its activities through Vāyu (who however cannot enter into or pervade the soul but can function in the soul's extension into the body, mind and sense-organs, as the rays of light from a lamp).

The method of exposition followed by Madhva and some of the leaders of the Dvaita system in subsequent years makes a fascinating study. For instance, Madhva prepared four different commentaries on Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma-sūtra: Bhāshya ("the commentary"), Anu-vyākhyāna ("follow-up annotation"), Anubhāshya ("brief commentary") and Nyāya-vivarana ("logical explanation"). In the introductory verse to the second work, the author says that the work was written in order to clarify the meanings of the earlier work (स्वयं कृतापि तद्व्याख्या क्रियते स्पष्टतार्थतः ।)

The method of clarification has been spelt out by Jayatīrtha: "in some places, what was left

unsaid has been made explicit; in some places, what was said very briefly has been elaborated; in some places, what could not be understood owing to an elaborate treatment has been condensed; in some places, what was scattered about in different contexts has been brought together; in some places, what was merely stated has been supported and justified; and in some places wrong interpretations have been rebutted and the correct position is defended" (Nyāyasudhā).

The third commentary is not only a summary of the first book, but tries to show that what has been said in the first book is also the brief statement of the final import of all scriptural lore सर्वशास्त्रार्थसङ्ग्रहः. The fourth commentary shows that Bādarāyaṇa's work is a purposeful progression of logically connected themes; it also refers to the *prima facie* views and offers to provide answers to objections. Further, this commentary has been prepared, according to the author himself, so as to benefit laymen as well as scholars (करोमि मन्दबुद्धीनां बुधानां चोपकारिकम् ।).

In his great treatise Mahābhārata-tātparyanirṇaya (which seeks to ascertain the final import

of Mahābhārata) he claims to have written this work only after studying well different systems of thought शास्त्रान्तराणि सञ्जानन् and also the Vedic texts, besides consulting books of different kinds during travel to different places (देशे देशे तथा ग्रन्थान् दृष्ट्वा चैव पृथग्विधान्) Books were not written by Madhva in a casual or light hearted manner, and expositions were not made in a cavalier fashion. Nor did he rely entirely on his own intuition. He took great pains, and planned his books with great care and circumspection. His purpose was to illuminate the real import of the classical texts and present tradition in as faithful a manner as possible.

He recognizes, for the first time in the history of Indian thought, that the sources of tradition are really numerous, varied and appealing to different groups of people in the society. Tradition is not derived wholly from the Veda, but also from epics like Mahābhārata and Mūla Rāmāyana; from the several Purāṇas which are popular among the folk; and from Pañcharātra, the manual of worship and conduct. And from all other writings which are not contrary to all these. Madhva looked for consistency in the multifaceted structure of

tradition, and sought to demonstrate the differential applicability of that tradition to individuals at varied levels of development and with vast differences in temperament and ability. For, tradition to be worthwhile must enter into every one's character and course of life.

BIMBA CONCEPT

The concept of 'bimba' is peculiar to this system of thought. The word means the deity, the real substance, the original reality. It is distinguished from 'prati-bimba', which signifies a counterpart, a reflection, an image. The physical body, which is inert and becomes enlivened and active only when the soul takes hold of it and assumes its form, is described as the pratibimba of the soul, which is its bimba. The pervasion of the soul in the physical body is like the rays of light from a lamp illumining a room. The pratibimba can neither exist nor function in the absence of bimba, even as there can be no reflection or image in the absence of the substance. However, the soul itself is only a pratibimba for the deity (Viṣṇu) who fills it and activates it and thus becomes the bimba for it. The soul is like coal into which fire (the Deity)

enters and makes it glow ('aṅgāre vahnim iva niveśya jīvam'). The deity is immanent in the soul, assuming its nature and pervading its form. When the deity abiding in the soul and assuming the form of the soul moves, the soul moves, and when the soul moves the physical body moves. This is known as the doctrine of 'bimbakriyā'.

BHEDA AND TĀRATAMYA

The basic premises with which Madhva begins is that phenomenal existence is a graded reality. It is not only the physical universe that occurs at different levels: life also illustrates hierarchy. Living beings are not only horizontally grouped; but are also vertically differentiated. Human populations too are divided into infinite orders of ability and eligibility. Madhva also recognizes that each individual soul is unique and real, not only in this phenomenal context, but even after liberation. Facts of empirical reality do not get annulled when metaphysically viewed. Existence and identity are inseparable. Tradition which is functional has to take this into cognizance. Hence the importance attached to conceptual structures like 'bheda'

(difference which is five fold) and 'tāratamya' (gradation) in the Dvaita system of thought. They are in the nature of philosophical constants. They are not only primary facts of perceptual reality which are implicit in all details of phenomenal existence, but they are also available for conceptualization.

But it is important to note that the idea of graded reality applies only to what may be described as contextual or phenomenological (asvatantra). It does not apply to the absolute and supreme reality (viz. Godhead), which as the Indwelling Spirit is the very core of each detail of the contextual reality (bimba), inspiring all thought and action (preraka), regulating all things (niyāmaka), and unaffectedly being the witness of all (sākshika). The absolute and supreme reality is one and undifferentiated, although present in the myraid particulars severally. Tradition is in the nature of communication between the absolute and supreme reality and the contextual reality. The individual soul as a detail of contextual reality gets to know about the absolute and supreme reality through the instrumentality of tradition. Madhva

undertakes it as a mission in his life to interpret this tradition for the layman as well as for the scholar. All the thirty seven works that he wrote, and which constitute the comprehensive source material (Sarva-mūla) for the Dvaita system of Vedānta are contributions towards this end.

Vedānta tradition is general, and Dvaita Vedānta in particular counsels each one of us to treat this life with all its advantages and troubles as an excellent opportunity to work out one's salvation. The proper motivation for Vedānta is not world-weariness but purposeful movement towards one's destiny. Nor is the goal merely an escape from transmigration and dissolution into dark insentience. Salvation has two aspects: release from phenomenal fetters (anishṭa-nivṛtti), and more importantly recovery of one's own true nature (ishṭa-prāpti). The latter is positive and bright happiness (ānanda). Indeed, Dvaita Vedānta emphasizes this aspect, and prescribes that worthwhile moksha for us is the realization of the presence, power and glory of Godhead within ones own inmost being (bimbaparoksha). This realization is not only a possibility but is easy and

effective. Madhva describes this procedure, expounded in Tantra-sāra, as an easy path with sure benefits (सुगमो मार्गः सफलश्चानुतिष्ठताम् ।). Obviously, the path is supremely relevant for us, living in a world as complex as the contemporary one, and being able to manage with nothing that is not simple.



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