

# **PHILOSOPHY OF ĀGAMAS**

## **Introduction**

The central figure of Viśiṣṭādvaita is Śrī Rāmānuja. He it was who propagated the system of thought known as Viśiṣṭādvaita by giving it a classical form and the discipline of life known as the path of devotion and surrender. Tradition has it that Sri Yāmunācārya wished three things to be achieved by Śrī Rāmānuja, namely a commentary on the Vedānta sūtras, a commentary on the Tiruvaymoḷi and the perpetuation of the names of vyāsa and parasara who had contributed to Viśiṣṭādvaita theory of Reality so much.

The teachings of Śrī Rāmānuja are securely based on 1. the Vedānta sūtras (which is the summary of the Upaniṣadic synthesis) 2. the Sacred Hymns of the Saints of Vaiṣṇavism (the āḷvār and the most important of them St. Sathakopa endearingly called Nam-āḷvār , our āḷvār ) 3. the Mahābhārata-Gītā of Veda vyāsa and 4. the Viṣṇupurāṇa of Parasara. The Gītā being a part of the Mahābhārata, it may well be said that it was one of the most important works to be reckoned with in any true synthesis of ancient thought. This feature of samanvaya that tried to reconceal in an integral manner the wisdoms of the Veda and the āḷvār and the itihāsa and Purāṇa, is unique in Viśiṣṭādvaita. We can say that though there have been earlier writers and great commentators who had tried to synthesise the three authoritative works (prasthan-traya)-the Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the Vedānta Sūtras, Śrī Rāmānuja following the foot steps of his great predecessor Śrī Yāmunācārya sought a wider synthesis with the living experiences of the Saints of South India who lived and moved and had their being in God (The Ultimate Being or Reality or Brahman. This is therefore called Ubhaya Vedānta the twofold Vedānta or wisdom of the Ultimate Reality, the synthesis or identity of Revelation (śruti) and Mystic experience of Reality (anubhava). It combined the Truth of Revelation with the Beauty of Mystic

experience which result in supreme delight – the delight of delights. The taught of truths becomes the Delight of delights, through the mediating enjoyment of the Mystic experience.

This confluence of tow tradition or rather of two traditions or rather of tow authentic truths is the characteristic of Viśiṣṭādvaita. It is the same truth f course expressed in tow distinct languages, Sanskrit and Tamil in respect of the content (tattva) in respect of way or means (hita) and in respect of goal or destiny (puruṣārtha) as well.

viśiṣṭādvaita or the theory which holds that the Ultimate Reality is characterized by having Souls and Nature as His attributes or body is claimed to be as old as the Vedas themselves. The Ultimate Reality described in the Upaniṣads is Brahman. This Brahman is the One and know as Viṣṇu (Omni-pervasive being) who is also known as Nārāyaṇa the goal, guide and good of the souls and all. The is also known as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the worlds for the purpose of redemption or of saving the souls. Accordingly the supreme bing is also Sriyahpathi, the Lord of Śrī, the Lord of the redemptive power or power or personality who grants utter felicity of freedom in God.

*The sources:*

The sources of Śrīvaiṣṇavism are the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, the Āgamas of Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa the Huymna sot the āḷvār . the tradition of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is therefore long and continuous. The Vedāntic tradition has been very hoard. Modern Historians are apt to make it go upt oteh period of the Upaniṣads which is placed around 1000 B.C. They also feel that the Mahābhārata war was around 1600 B.C. though the actual writing of the same is pushed to a much later date. The Āgamas claim to be established by a line of great saints of integral theism Pāñcarātra of which Śrī Kṛṣṇa is said to be on of the founders or in other Nārāyaṇa Himself is said to be the promulgator of Pāñcarātra Though traditional accounts place the Āḷvārs at the beginning of

Kaliyuga, that is about the second millennium B.C., modern historians are apt to place them between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

Though the Pāñcarātra āgama is pauruṣeya or made by a person, it is by the Supreme Person Himself and as such it can hold its own with the Vedas which is apauruṣeya or not made but eternal as the Divine Lord Himself. The Pāñcarātra āgama is said to be an authority for Viśiṣṭādvaita by Yāmunācārya in his Āgama pramānya. Śrī Rāmānuja in the Śrī Bhāṣya says that the Pāñcarātra āgama is authoritative and is not refuted by the Vedāngta Sūtrakāra, Bādarāyaṇa, though Śrī Sankara holds that it is also refuted like the other darśanas refuted in that chapter of refutations. Śrī Vedānta Deśika or Venkaṭanātha has substantially refuted the position of Yāmunācārya in his Pāñcarātra Rakṣa which is said to be a commentary on the Āgamaprāmānya.

In his Āgamaprāmānya Yāmuna states that the validity of Pāñcarātra is to be assumed because it claims its origin in Vāsudeva or Nārāyaṇa. this Nārāyaṇa is undoubtedly the Person or Divine Lord who is the origin of creation, etc., to be found discussed in the Upan and the Purāṇas. The Pāñcarātra has been promulgated for the benefit of the devotees who are impatient of following the elaborate details prescribed in Vedic literature, not in contradiction to them nor derivable from them. Therefore the Vedic texts supporting the Pāñcarātra texts are not discovered in the Vedas. The desired end prescribed by the Pāñcarātra is not found in Vedas, so much so Śāndilya and others turned to bhakti. The ceremonies (pancasamskaras) of Pāñcarātra are not Vedic ones, but they are not contrary to them. Mahābhārata counsels Pāñcarātra and therefore the Vedānta Sūtra kara, who is the same as the author of the Mahābhārata, really does not refute the Pāñcarātra darśana.

Vedānta Deśika quoted vyasa as saying that *idam mahopaniṣdam catur – veda – samavitamsāmkhya-yoga-kṛtāntena Pāñcarātraśabditam* (Saiśvara Mīmāṃsā

Again *Pāñcarātra* is deemed to be the source of the Veda

Mahato veda vṛkśasya mūlabhūto mahan ayam: *or vice versa*

Srutimūlam idam tantra prāmaṇa kalpa – sūtravat: and as a alternative

Alabhe veda mantrāṇam pāncarātraditena va:

All these quotations show that pan was considered to be an equal pramana to the Sruti even by the author of the Mahābhārata.

Further the fundamental teaching of the Pāñcarātra reaches upto a level of thought which emphasizes the path or integralism regarding the nature of Brahman (Vāsudeva Nārāyaṇa – Viṣṇu) as fivefold, and the means to be God Himself – a means which has to be got only through complete surrender to Him. briefly speaking, the Nature of God is such that He is the Transcendent Being beyond all descriptions and knowings (Para). This appears to be the so called impersonal but really it is Superpersonal, for it includes all that is presented to the world and cosmos as primeval cause and ground of all, as the Self of all, as the Worshipable Form of an auspiciousness and as the Incarnating Personality; and all these five forms are suitable for the complete attainment of the soul. The soul itself becomes through out as one with the Divine Lord, Vasudeva, in all His multiple forms and perceives itself as part of Him. the souls are numerically infinite and many. The World itself or Nature is also part of Himself in a different sense and is eternal also, though changing or being modified. The Lord when he creates the world but manifests the unmanifest, the potential (sūkṣma) subtle condition is evolved into the gross and visible (sthūla) or patent condition. All the souls on the one hand and the prakṛti on the other are His amass through his being their self (*antaryāmin* and *niyanta*).

The detailed conceptions of the evolution of Prakṛti as His power and as such entirely subserving His purpose follows a course similar to that of samkhya.

(I) SATVATASAMHITA

This samhita is said to have been taught by the Lrod at the request of Samkarṣaṇ. It contains 25 chapters and describes the forms of worshipping Nārāyaṇa in all His four vyūha manifestations Ívara. Samhita says that originally there existed Ekayana Veda which was the source of the Ekayana and ten taught it to only some selected persons, ekantins.

Śandilay learnt the Ekayana from Samkarṣana and taught it to Rṣis Śāstra became triple according to the guṇas so to speak depending on the nature of the original śāstra-thus the original taught by Vāsudeva was sativika – those which have been transmitted by rṣis, Rajasa, and then which have been transmitted or adulterated by men, *tamasa*.

(II) JAYAKHYASAMHITA

Jayākhyā starts by saying that the mere performance of sacrifices dāna, veda-study and performance of expiatory rites will not lead to Mokṣa knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, or the Para-tattiva which is all pervasive, eternal, self-realised, pure consciousness which can take all forms, is the only means to one's salvation or mukti.

This highest reality resides in our hearts and is nirguṇa, and guṇa-guhyta and is anamaka. This reality can be known only through the śāstra and the śāstra can only be learnt from a teacher. Thus the teacher is the first and primary means to the attainment of the Reality.

Regarding creation Jayākhyā says that there are three kinds of creation:

- i) Brahma – sarga, the birth of Brahma;
- ii) Sadvaraka: The evolution of Prakṛit – the to work, the oil and fire which act together in a lamp. The gunas form an

enseparable unity-bhinnam edātma lakṣaṇm,. but in evolution, sattva comes first, then rajas and then tamas, the Buddhi-tattva comes first, and from this three kinds of anamkāra arise: *prakāśātma*, *vikṛtyātma* the bhūtayonis (tanmatras) arise; and from these the five gross elements. From *vikṛtyātma* the motor organs are evolved. Prakṛit is acit. The products of prakṛit being suffused with the glow of the self as pure consciousness one with Brahmna appear as being endowed with consciousness; *old-rūpam ātmatattvam yad abhinam brahmaṇi sthitami tenaitac chūritam bhāti acit cinmayavad viya || Jayākhyā (||| 14).*

iii) Sudha-sarga; pure creation, in which Vasudeva evolved out of Himself, Acyuta, Satya and Puruśa, who are One with Him and have no different existence as Puruṣa, He is the inner controller of all ordinary gods and all human beings too and helps them in removing their bonds.

iv) AHIRBUDHNYASAMHITA

The Ahirbudhnya Samhita speaks about the Highest person or being as Nirguṇa in the sense that he has not the qualities of sattva. Rajas and tamas of prakṛit but has the qualities of *jñānabala*, *aiśvarya*, *virya*, *tejas* and *śakti*. Indeed the primal power is \Sudarśaṇa. unchanged in Himself He creates the material world. He is the material cause of the world, in this lies virya; his spontaneity of activity is called aiśvarya; his power śakti) lies in his creating the world. He is un-fatigued in creation hence his strength (bala). His self-sufficiency (tejas) is that by virtue of which he creates the world by His own unaided efforts. These are however the qualities of His knowledge (jñāna) which is the essence of God. The

peculiar theory is that in the *śuddha sarga*. So to speak, the three forms of Samkarsaṇa, Pradhyumna and Aniruddha have dominantly the qualities of jñāna - bala aiśvarya, Vīrya and *śakti-tejas* respectively. These three forms are called vyūhas are revealed or manifested in a supra – temporal succession. The vyūhas are the presiding deities of the souls. *Ahamkāra* and *manas*, and thus Samkarsūana, superintends the souls (in their collective being) and separates them from prakṛtim the second pradhyumna superintends the ego of all creatures and the third superintends the manas.

Each one has the cosmic function of creation as well as redemption. The Godhead has in addition to the two forms of Transcendent and vyūhas, other forms such as antaryāmi and avatar and arcā

There are indeed several versions of the manner how the avatars or descents of God happen; there are partial manifestations or just processional descents or full descents.

Some of them are descents permanently during the period of creative manifestation just as the lords of the months; some are descents from the vyūhas, the gods are all amśavatars. The most well known avatars, namely, the ten reckoned, are all capable of being worshipped, whereas the partial avatars liberation. Inspired avatars are only those who belong to this category.

Sudarśaṇa is the power by which the vyūhas are verily produced. It is the Divine Idea. The Lord in the highest form is always associated with His power (śakti) Lakṣmi or Śrī. There are three forms of this Śakti known as Lakṣmi or Śrī. There are three forms of its Śakit know as Lakṣhmi, Bhūmi and Nīlā, corresponding to Icchā, jñāna , and kriya, Sun, Moon and Fire, the last being responsible for all kinds of vegetation and all temporal determinations. From the

vyūhas and the vibhava proceeds the impure creation. The impure creation comprises the emergence of gross manifestation of the puruṣas (souls), guṇa (prakṛit) and kāla (time). From Pradhymn's forehead, eyebrows, and ears emanate the subtle time and guṇas from his mouth, breast, thighs and legs emanate the four castes. After these have emanated, Aniruddha comes into play who by his *tapas* separates kāla into its two fold forms of *kāla niyati* (fixed order of tiems). Guṇas were divided by Him into *sattva, rajas and tamas*. This procedure can be said to assume the sat-kārya vāda in a limited sense for without the impregnation from the fervour of Aniruddha, it could not by itself have produced the different guṇas of *sattva, rajas and tamas*. We can see that Aniruddha or the Ultimate Spirit is the creator, the material as well as the efficient cause, for these guṇas etc. are as energies inseparably related to the Supreme Spirit. Aniruddha created Brahma and Brahma created all men and women of the four castes according to Viśvaksena samhita. According to Mahābhārata, Aniruddha begot Brahma in the morning, Viṣṇu in the noon and Rudra in the evening Tirumalisai Āḷvārs, version is that Brahma produced Rudra.

Jīvas or puruṣas are pure, but due to the will of God they are affected by avidyā, it is external to them and they are themselves pure. Though their caste and sex distinctions are anādi, primordial and transcendent (puruṣa-sūkta), they are uncreated, and amśas of God. Thus a cue is given to the understanding of the anādikarma as that which involved functional differentiations at the very beginning and thus determining the *svabhāva* of each soul as well as its *svadharma* issuing from it. It is clear also that avidyā as karma is really the duty that has to be done- a development of the meaning of the concept later made by Śrī Rāmānuja.

The Pāñcarātra, says Das Gupta is partly based in the Vedic and partly on the Tantric system (*Veda-tantramayodbhūta nānā prasavaśālinī*: Ahir. Vi. 9) Sudarśaṇa power manifests all the natural, physical and other kinds of energies and powers of all things in the world. The power of the Sudarśaṇa manifests itself in the form of all living being and of all that is inanimate in the course of bondage

and also of emancipation. Whatever is able to produce is to be regarded as the manifestation of Sudarśana. the mantras too are to be regarded as the energy of Viṣṇu (kriyā śakti: sāmārthya or yoga or parameṣṭhya or mahatejas or māyā-yoga: Ahir. Xvi 32. Das Gupta p 58) Nāda, bindu, śabda Brahma, and the evolution of the several sounds, vowel and consonant, takes place thereafter.

The method of Yoga is prescribed for Union with the Supreme: Two method namely the Self Surrender or the self offering to the Godhead (ātma-samarpaṇa) are advocated.

There are tow types of souls, the baddhaas and the muktas. Union with Brahmanis possible through Karma and Yoga. Karma is of tow kind (a) pravartaka (prompted by desires) and (b) *nivartaka* (prompted by cessation of desires.) the Supreme Soul is described as sūkṣma, sarva-ga, sarvabhṛt, jñāna rūpa, anādyanta, avikāra. Yoga takes the course of Yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇa, dhyāna, and samādhi. Yama: is satya, daya, dhṛit, śauca, brahmacarya, kṣama, ārjava, mitāhāra, āsteya, and ahimsa.

Niyama: Compirses siddhanta śragvana, dana, faith in scriptural texts (mati), Iśvarapūjana (of Viṣṇu), santosa, tapah, āstikya, hrīh (shame in doing wrong activities), japa, vrata.

Prama: is defined by Ahirbudhya as yathartha-vadhāraṇam: definite knowledge of a thing as it exists. Pramana is that which lends to it; these are tow *hita and sadhana*. Oneness with God is Hita (supremely beneficial). Dharma and jñāna lead to oneness with God. The knowledge is of two kinds, sāksātkārā and parokṣa. dharma is the cause of knowledge and if tow kinds; one which leads directly and the other indirectly to the worship of God. Self – offering is said to be the indirect dharma whereas the path of Yogin is said to be the direct dharma such as is taught in the Pāñcarātra literature called the *sātvata śāsana*. By the Samkhya path one can have indirect knowledge of God but through Yoga and Vedanta one can have direct intuition of God.

The self-offering or Ātma-samarpana is specially mentioned as having for its steps six conditions namely Ānukūlya samkalpa, prātikūlya varjanam, goptr̥tva varan̥am, Mahāviśvāsam, kārpanyam and Ātmanikṣepam. This method is pen to all those who have come to a stage of complete collapse of mind and helplessness and confusion of mind which no one could help to overcome. This has been emphasized by the pan Āgamas as the supreme method by which one can find refuge in God and through His grace can gain such fitness for the higher and nobler work through God – knowledge or and ultimately emancipation from the bonds of prakṛti. The great Teachers of Viśiṣṭādvaita also taught that there is no difference in essentials between Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa Āgama, an Āgama that owes its origin to one sage Vikhanas who had also taught image worship and accepted the five fold form of the Highest Deity. The temple worship was conducted according to a, different pattern with more Vaidika mantras rather than Pāñcarātra tāntrika mantras. Śrī Venkṭanātha shows their identity of purpose and philosophic identity.