

# ŚRĪVAIṢṄAVISM THROUGH THE AGES

## FOREWORD

*Originally Śrīvaiṣṇavism through the Ages appeared as an article in the Prabuddha Bharata ( January 1966 ) a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order. The same is now being brought out as a booklet after some revision. We earnestly hope that this will serve as an introduction to the study of Viśiṣṭādvaita and the cult of Śrīvaiṣṇavism which are important aspects of the Vedāntic religion. We are grateful to the devotees of the Lord, who like to remain anonymous, for having contributed to subsidising this book.*

### Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation – sounds like

अ, a-o in son,	ठ ṭh-th in ant-hill
आ , ā-a in master,	ड ḍ-d in den
इ i-i in if,	ढ ḍh-dh in godhood
ई ī-ee in feel,	ण ṇ-n in under
उ u-u in full,	त t-t in French
ऊ ū-oo in boot,	थ th-th in thumb
ऋ ṛ-somewhat between r and ri,	द d-th in then
	ध dh-the in breathe
ए e-ay in May,	न n-n in not
ऐ ai-y in my,	प p-p in pen
ओ o-o in oh,	फ ph-ph in loop-hole
औ au-ow in now,	ब b-b in bag
क k-k in keen,	भ bh-bh in abhor
ख kh-ckh in blockhead,	म m-m in mother
ग g-g (hard) in go,	य y-y in yard
घ gh-gh in log-hut,	र r-r in run
ङ ṅ-ng in singer,	ल l-l in luck
च c-ch in chain,	व v-v in avert
छ ch-chh in catch him,	श ś-sh in reich (German)
ज j-j in judge,	ष ṣ-sh in show
झ jh-dgeh in hedgehog,	स s-in sun
ञ ñ-n (somewhat) as in French,,	ह h-in hot
ट ṭ-t in ten,	
ॠ ṛ-m in sum,	:ḥ-h in half

## CONTENTS

1. *Introduction*
2. *The Āḷvāras*
3. *The Ācāryās*
4. *Śrī Rāmānuja*
5. *Split in Śrīvaiṣṇava Ranks*
6. *Apostolic Successors of Śrī Rāmānuja*
7. *Śrī Vedānta Deśika*
8. *Piḷḷai Lokācārya*
9. *Maṇavāḷa Māmuni*
10. *Śrīvaiṣṇavism in Practice*
11. *Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas*
12. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*
  - Epistemology*
  - Ontology*
  - Means of Liberation*
  - State of Liberation*
13. *Conclusion*

## ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVISM THROUGH THE AGES

### Introduction

Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the religion, and Viśiṣṭā-dvaita Vedānta, its philosophy, are of hoary antiquity. In his introductory verse of Śrībhāṣya (the commentary on the Brahma Sūtras), Śrī Rāmānuja traces this philosophy to the Upaniṣads, which was well guarded by the later Ācāryas like Vyāsa, Bodhāyana, ṭaṅka, Dramiḍa, Guhadeva, Kapardin, Bhāruci and others. According to the tradition that obtains among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the religion of Śrīvaiṣṇavism was first taught by the Lord Nārāyaṇa himself to Lakṣmī, his divine Consort, who communicated the same to Viṣvaksena. From him it was handed over to a series of teachers headed by Śaṭhakopa.

### The Āḷvārs

Āḷvārs are Śrīvaiṣṇava saints of the Tamil country who lived between the sixth and the ninth centuries A.D. The word 'Āḷvār' literally means one who is immersed in divine love. They are twelve in number: Poygai, Pūdam, Pey, Tirumoliśai, Nammāḷvār, Kulaśekhara, Periyāḷvār, Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi, Tirumaṅgai, Tiruppāṇ, Madhurakavi, and Āṇḍāl. Theirs was a religion of ecstatic love for God. Hence, neither caste nor sex was any barrier to their attaining to that state.

Coming to the historical times, it was these Āḷvārs who first propagated the religion and the philosophy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism through their songs. These songs, called the Nālāyira Prabandham, combine in themselves rare poetic beauty and high philosophical tenets, couched in a simple language.

Nammāḷvār, the author of the famous Tiruvāimoli, is by far the greatest among them. He is called the Kūṭastha by the later Ācāryas of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, because the fundamental doctrines of this faith as current today, were taught by him.

### The Ācāryās

The Āḷvār movement was more emotional in nature than metaphysical. The Āḷvārs were great devotees of the Lord Viṣṇu. They believed in the impermanence of worldly enjoyments and in the acquisition of liberation by union with Him. They taught more by example than by precept, though they propagated the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita in their songs.

Hence it was left to the Ācāryas beginning with Nāthamuni, who succeeded the Āḷvārs, to put the system on a firm footing, basing it both upon the Sanskrit scriptures and the Tamil teachings of the Āḷvārs. The Ācāryas were very orthodox brāhmaṇas, well-versed equally in Sanskrit and Tamil, who passed through the different stages of orthodox life and discharged their duties so as to serve as an ideal for their followers. Apart from expounding the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita, they also laid down various rules for the proper observance of festivals, fasts, vows and customs. They were thus the makers of modern Śrīvaiṣṇavism. It is not surprising, therefore, that they in turn have become objects of worship like the Āḷvārs whom they themselves apotheosized.

The first of the Ācāryas was Raṅganātha muni, popularly known as Nāthamuni ( A.D. 824-924). He was at once an erudite scholar, a yogin, and a devotee. It was he who first collected all the Prabandhams, edited them with proper introductory verses, popularized them by setting them to music, and made them sung in temples. It was, again, he who gave these Prabandhams the status equal to that of the Vedas in temple festivals. The various reforms brought about by Nāthamuni necessitated the

creation of a post of a universal Ācārya whose authority was law in religious worship and whose advice was a guide to temples and house-holders. It was but natural that when such a post was established, the choice should fall on Nāthamuni himself. Since this office was combined with the management of the Śrīraṅgam temple, it was easy for the Ācāryas to revolutionize and reorganize the Śrīvaiṣṇava cult by introducing the necessary reforms first in that temple, which is one of the most important shrines of Viṣṇu and a stronghold of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

Nāthamuni was succeeded by Puṇḍarī-kākṣa and Rāmamiśra for two short periods. Then came Yāmunācārya ( A.D. 918-1038), who was the grandson of Nāthamuni himself. It was he who, endowed with great scholarship and insight, first attempted to put the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy on a firm foundation. He wrote scholarly works in Sanskrit defending it, and established the orthodoxy of the Pāñcarātra school, whose authority is accepted as equal to that of the Śrutis by the Viśiṣṭādvaitins. Siddhitraya and Āgamaprāmāṇya are his two important works, in addition to the Gītārthasaṅgraha. It was his cherished desire to write a commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita, just as Śaṅkara had done according to the Advaita. But he died before he could attempt it, and it fell on Rāmānuja to achieve it.

### **Śrī Rāmānuja (A.D. 1017-1137)**

The name of Śrī Rāmānuja is inseparably associated with the Viśiṣṭādvaita, just as Śrī Śaṅkara's is with the Advaita. The traditional date of his birth is A.D. 1017, and he is said to have lived for 120 years. Yāmuna died before Śrī Rāmānuja became the Ācārya, and the interval was filled up by Mahāpūrṇa.

Yāmuna bequeathed to Rāmānuja the three great tasks of his life which he himself had failed to achieve, viz., the perpetuation of the memory of the sage Parāśara, the immortalization of the glory of Nammālvār, and the interpretation of Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtras according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita system. Śrī Rāmānuja fulfilled all these three in his lifetime. He commanded Bhaṭṭa, the son of Kūreśa, to write a commentary on the Viṣṇusahasranāma, and named him as Parāśara. He authorized Kurukeśa, the son of his uncle Śrīśailapūrṇa, to compose a commentary on the Tiruvāimoḷi of Nammālvār.

To achieve the third object, Śrī Rāmānuja had to undertake an arduous journey to Kashmir, where the last surviving copy of the Vṛtti of Bodhāyana, a commentary on the Brahma Sūtras was available. After going through it with great difficulty, he composed his Śrībhāṣya, a masterly commentary on the Brahma Sūtras.

Śrī Rāmānuja was as great an organizer as he was a thinker. He divided the Śrīvaiṣṇava world into seventy-four Ācāryic dioceses, over each of which he appointed a pious householder as the head or 'simhāsanādhipati' as he was called. These spiritual leaders earnestly took up the work of carrying the message of Viśiṣṭādvaita to all the villages and homes, each within his diocese.

### **Split in Śrīvaiṣṇava Ranks**

The demise of Śrī Rāmānuja was followed by a period of sectarian split among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, which ultimately ended in the permanent division of their ranks into the two sects of Vaḍagalais and Teṅgalais. These words literally mean the followers of the northern and the southern schools respectively.

The two sects developed separate sets of works, separate lineage of gurus, and separate traditions in many matters of practical importance.

The language of the holy books to be studied, the comparative importance of bhakti and prapatti (self-surrender) in the path of liberation, relation with the lower castes, details of certain ceremonials to be observed on certain special occasions, and a few other questions were the causes for such a division.

The Vaḍagalais favoured the Sanskrit works and the path of bhakti, and were more conservative in their relation towards the lower castes. The Teṅgalais, on the other hand, preferred the Tamil works to the Sanskrit ones, and laid greater stress on prapatti based on the mārjalakiśora-nyāya (the maxim of the kitten totally dependent on its mother) than on the markaṭakiśoranyāya (the maxim of the young one of the monkey which clings to its mother). The latter assumes self-effort as a prerequisite to prapatti whereas the former does not.

Though there has never been a check to interdining, intermarriage, and free social harmony at home or at the temple, the allegiance to different teachers and philosophies, as also the scramble for control over the temples, has perpetuated this division.

### **Apostolic Successors of Śrī Rāmānuja**

The two sects have a different guru- paramparā (succession of teachers) though both trace their origin to Śrī Rāmānuja himself. Kurukeśa was the first successor of Śrī Rāmānuja according to the Vaḍagalais. Viṣṇucitta his successor, is the author of two famous works Sārārthacatuṣṭaya and Viṣṇucittiyam (a commentary on the Viṣṇupurāṇa). The next in line is Varadārya or Varadācārya, otherwise known as Naḍādūr Ammāḷ. A substance of his lectures and interpretations of the Śrībhāṣya was committed to writing under the title of Śrutaparakāśikā by a talented disciple of his, named Sudarśana-sūri.

After the death of Varadārya, the Ācāryaship devolved on Ātreya Rāmānuja, who in turn was succeeded by Vedānta Deśika or Veṅkaṭanātha.

### **Śrī Vedānta Deśika (A.D. 1268-1370)**

Śrī Vedānta Deśika, who was a contemporary of Śrī Vidyāraṇya, is undoubtedly the greatest of the Ācāryās of the post Rāmānuja period. For more than three quarters of a century, he enriched the Śrīvaiṣṇava world with his teachings and writings. His works number more than a hundred, and are characterized by versatility, beauty of style and thought, and a deep spiritual insight. He was a poet, a philosopher, a thinker, a polemist, and a sage, all rolled into one. His works include original writings in Tamil, as also commentaries on older works. Gītā-bhāṣya-tātparyā-candrikā, bhāṣya on the Īśāvāsyopaniṣad, Tattvaṭīkā, Adhikaraṇa-sārāvalī, Nyāya-siddhañjana, Saccharitarakṣā, Rahasyatrayasāra, and Haṁsasandeśa are only a few of the important works which may be mentioned here. It is not a matter of surprise that he was called in his own times as 'Kavitārkikasimha.' One of the greatest of his services was his saving the Śrutaparakāśikā from the chaos that followed in the wake of invasion of Śrīraṅgam by the Mohammedans. It is for this reason that his name as Vedāntācārya is gratefully remembered by all the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, without sectarian bias, in beginning the study of the Śrībhāṣya.

### **Piḷḷai Lokācārya (A.D. 1264-1327)**

The Teṅgalai sect traces the apostleship in succession of Śrī Rāmānuja in the following manner: Embār, Parāśara Bhaṭṭa, Nañjīyar (the famous commentator of the Prabandham), Nampillai, Kṛṣṇapāda, Piḷḷai Lokācārya, Tirumalai Āḷvār, Maṇavāḷa Māmuni (or Varavaramuni). Among these, Piḷḷai Lokācārya,

who was a contemporary of Vedānta Deśika, occupies the same place amidst the Teṅgalais as Deśika does among the Vaḍagalais. In fact, he is generally regarded as the founder of Teṅgalaism as a distinct sect. Being a man of brilliant intellect, he composed several treatises in order to uphold his school. Vacanabhūṣaṇa is a difficult work in aphoristic style which deals with the doctrine of prapatti in all its aspects. For the benefit of women and the common folk, Lokācārya composed sixteen treatises on the secret doctrines and the philosophy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism like Nigamanappaḍi, Mumukṣuppaḍi, Tattvatraya, Arthapañcaka, etc. Though most of these works are small in size, they are regarded by the Teṅgalai school as the only correct interpretation of the cults of Śrī Rāmānuja and the Āḷvārs.

### **Maṇavāḷa Māmuni (A.D. 1370-1443)**

Piḷḷai Lokācārya was succeeded by Śrīsaileśa, who in turn handed over the Ācāryaship to Maṇavāḷa Māmuni, also known as Aḷaḷiya Maṇavāḷa or Varavaramuni. He was a master of the Tamil Veda and other lore. Though he was trained by the teachers of the Vaḍagalai sect also, he openly declared that Ṭḍu (the commentary by Kṛṣṇapāda on the Tamil Veda) was the equal of Śrībhāṣya. He wrote several works explaining the treatises of Piḷḷai Lokācārya. Though his works were limited in range and diction, he gave a definite form to Teṅgalaism. His magnetic personality elevated him in the eyes of his followers to the position of an incarnation of Śrī Rāmānuja.

### **Śrīvaiṣṇavism in Practice**

Everyone born in a Śrīvaiṣṇava family must approach a proper guru and undergo what is called 'pañcasamskāra,' if he is to be considered as a true Śrīvaiṣṇava. This five-fold ritual includes tapas or the Ācārya's initiating the student into the sacred fire by branding the latter's shoulders with the symbols of Viṣṇu; the puṇḍra or initiating into wearing the sectarian mark, the symbol of the Lord's foot; giving a spiritual name like Nārāyaṇadāsa or Govindadāsa to the disciple; imparting the three mantras. viz., the aṣṭākṣarī, the dvaya, and the caramaśloka; and handing over a śālagrāma or other concrete objects for daily worship.

Though in theory this pañcasamskāra is enough to secure the devotee's entry into the blissful world of Lord Viṣṇu, in practice he finds that his past karma and present weaknesses are serious obstacles to spiritual progress. He is thus forced to realize that the Lord's grace is absolutely necessary, and therefore surrenders himself at his feet. This is technically called 'prapatti' or 'śaraṇāgati,' and the devotee who does it is known as a 'prapanna.'

The prapanna is again, in need of a mediator, since he is unable to communicate with the Lord directly. Therefore, he has to go to a teacher and beg him to intercede on his behalf and place his soul at the Lord's feet. This vicarious employment of the teacher is technically designated as 'bhāraṇyāsa.'

### **Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas**

The evolution and consolidation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism as a cult is closely associated with the origin and development of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas or monasteries. From the most ancient times, āśramas and maṭhas in India have been the repositories of religion in theory and practice. Their heads, whether monks or pious householders, have been responsible for arresting the decay of dharma and for propagating true religion, apart from guiding the society often in secular matters also. The same holds good in the case of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas too. Ahobila Maṭha, Parakāla Maṭha, Yadugiri Yatirāja Maṭha, Āṇḍavan Maṭha and Vānamāmalai Maṭha- these are some of the important maṭhas of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

The Ahobila Maṭha was founded in the year A.D. 1398, in the Ahobila Kshetra of Andhra Pradesh, by Śrīnivāsācārya, who became a saṁnyāsīn under the name of Ādi Vaṇa Śaṭhakopa Svāmin. He was a great scholar and lived as a saṁnyāsīn for the full length of sixty-years. The successive Jeers or abbots of the Maṭha have kept up the tradition of erudition and of touring the country to spread religion.

According to the tradition that obtains at the Parakāla Maṭha in Mysore (Karnataka), its founder was Śrī Vedānta Deśika himself. His disciple, Periya Brahmaṭantra Svatantra Svāmin, occupied the pīṭha or pontifical seat in A.D. 1360. So far there have been thirty-three Jeers. The principal deity worshipped in the Maṭha is Hayagrīva, which has been handed down to the Maṭha from Śrī Vedānta Deśika himself.

Yadugiri is a small hill, about thirty miles to the east of Mysore. It is claimed that Śrī Rāmānuja himself established a maṭha here during A.D. 1103. This Maṭha, known as Yadugiri Yatirāja Maṭha, had a branch at Rewa, which is now functioning independently. Some of the Jeers of this Maṭha had kept contacts with North India also.

The Āṇḍavan Maṭha, better known as "Śrīraṅgam Āṇḍavan Āśrama," has its main centre at Śrīraṅgam in Tamil Nadu. Vedānta Rāmānuja Deśika is the founder of this Maṭha, the youngest among the Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṭhas. It was started in early nineteenth century. The present head is the seventh in the apostolic succession.

Vānamāmalai Maṭha was established at Nanguneri, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, by Maṇavāla Māmuni during the fourteenth century A.D. So far there have been twenty-seven Jeers.

### **The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita**

Any account of the history of Śrīvaiṣṇava-vism should be deemed incomplete without a description of its philosophical tenets. As has already been pointed out, this philosophy is much older than Śrī Rāmānuja, who only systematized it. However, the pioneering and yet stupendous work he has turned out in the cause of Viśiṣṭādvaita has justified its being called as 'Rāmānuja Darśana.' Viśiṣṭādvaita is essentially a philosophy of religion.

In it, reason and faith coalesce to become 'reasoned faith.' It is often identified with the older 'Seśvara Mīmāṁsā,' and is also called 'Ubhaya Vedānta,' since it accepts both the Sanskrit Prasthānatraya and the Tamil Prabandham as equally authoritative. Pāñcarātra treatises are also put on a par with the Vedas.

### **EPISTEMOLOGY**

Śrī Rāmānuja accepts knowledge in all its levels of sense-perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), and scriptural testimony (āgama or śabda) as valid, and also that it affirms reality. The principle of dharma-bhūtajñāna, the logical rule of aprthak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa, the grammatical rule of sāmānādhikaraṇya, and the realistic view of satkāryavāda are the special features of his theory of knowledge.

Dharmabhūta-jñāna is the consciousness of the individual soul as its attribute, through which it comes to know the nature of the external world, Self, and Īśvara or Brahman. It is eternal and all-pervasive in respect of Īśvara and the jīvas. However, owing to the limitations imposed by karma, it has become contracted. When it is purified, it expands into infinity and brings about an immediate intuition of God.

The logical rule of apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa states that a viśeṣaṇa (quality) subsists in the viśeṣya (the qualified substance) and is apr̥thak-siddha or has an inseparable existence. Of course, it is not absolutely identical with it. It is separate and yet inseparable. For instance, when we say that 'man is rational,' the quality of rationality is inseparable from man, though it is not man himself. In the view of Śrī Rāmānuja, dharma-bhūta-jñāna is an apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa of the jīva; the jīvas and prakṛti are apr̥thak-siddha-viśeṣaṇa of Brahman or Īśvara.

This very truth is brought out by the grammatical rule of sāmānādhikarāṇya or co-ordinate predication, which means the application of two terms to a single entity through connotation of its two modes. For example, in the sentence 'This is a cow,' different words connoting genus and quality (i.e. jāti and guṇa) also connote individual (vyakti) and substance (guṇin) respectively. Same is the case with the Upaniṣadic text 'Tat tvam asi' (Thou art That). A substance may become the body or quality of another substance and a word connoting the body (śarīra) may connote the self, its possessor (śarīrin) also. Therefore, in the above example, the term 'tvam,' which connotes the jīva as the śarīra, connotes also Brahman, the śarīrin. Thus, in the highest Vedāntic sense, all terms connoting a thing or a person or a god connote also Brahman as the source, support, and the ultimate Self of all.

The Sāṅkhya theory of satkāryavāda, the theory of pre-existent effect, is accepted by Śrī Rāmānuja. Consequently, the world, which is a transformation (pariṇāma) of Brahman, is real and not illusory as asserted by the Advaitins.

## ONTOLOGY

Viśiṣṭādvaita accepts the three entities, viz., Brahman or Īśvara, jīva or cit, and prakṛti or acit as the ultimate realities. Hence, these three together are called 'tattvatraya.' Of these, however, Brahman is the absolute, independent reality, whereas the other two are dependent realities. It is for this reason that this philosophy is known as Viśiṣṭādvaita (Viśiṣṭa Advaita), a philosophy which accepts only one Reality, but with attributes or modes.

Brahman of Viśiṣṭādvaita is both the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion at the same time. Truth (satya) knowledge (jñāna), infinity (anantatva), and bliss (ānandatva) are his attributes. He is the repository of all virtues and perfections.

He is the progenitor, the protector, and the destroyer of this universe. He is also the indweller and controller of everything that exists in this universe. He is the śeṣin (the whole) of whom all the jīvas and the prakṛti are śeṣa (parts). He is the granter of all boons, whether it is righteousness (dharma), worldly gain (artha), and enjoyment of pleasures (kāma) or the attainment of freedom from births and deaths (mokṣa). His form is most wonderfully beautiful, absolutely free from all imperfections and defects. Out of his infinite mercy, he incarnates himself in moments of cosmic crisis into humanity, in order that he may recover the lost jīva. He is the master of Śrī or Lakṣmī, Bhū, and Nīlā. Śrī is of the nature of mercy.

He enjoys the cosmic līlā or play of creation. He creates this universe out of the cit and acit portions of himself and yet remains unaffected in his essential nature. Since he creates in accordance with the past karma of the individual souls, he can never be accused of partiality or hardheartedness.

He has a fivefold form, viz., para, vyūha, vibhava, antaryāmin and arca. The first is his form in Vaikuṅṭha, along with Śrī, Bhū, Nīlā, Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and others. The avatāras of Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, who are his partial manifestations and who are the objects of



contemplation by the devotees, go by the name of vyūha. The incarnations of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Kūrma, etc., are called as vibhava. As the indwelling spirit of each and every object (animate or inanimate), he is called the antaryāmin. The descent into the forms, symbols, or idols worshipped by his devotees, in order to bless them, is known as arcāvatāra.

The next tattva is cit or the jīva. The jīvas are innumerable but of identical form and nature. Each jīva is essentially different from the body, mind, prāṇa, buddhi, and dharmabhūta-jñāna. He is blissful (ānanda-svarūpa), atomic (aṇu), unmanifested (avyakta), unthinkable (acintya), homo-geneous (niravayava), immutable (nirvikāra) and substratum of consciousness and knowledge (jñānāśraya). He is controlled by Īśvara (niyamyā), and is a part of him (śeṣa). He is knower of knowledge, doer of actions, and experiencer of their results (jñātr, kartṛ, and bhokṛ).

The jīvas can be divided into three groups: the bound (baddha), the liberated (mukta), and the eternally free (nitya). The bound souls are those who are constantly going through this transmigratory existence being attracted by and attached to the prakṛti in all its forms. Those of the bound souls who awaken to the evils of saṁsāra owing to their previous good karma and get liberated by doing spiritual practices and by the grace of God belong to the second category. Those like Ananta or Garuḍa who are never bound by the shackles of saṁsāra form the third category. The jīva, though essentially free, becomes bound in saṁsāra by the proximity of prakṛti, avidyā, karma, vāsanā, and ruci. Avidyā is ignorance which manifests itself in various forms like anyathā-jñāna (knowing a thing in a way that is different from what it really is), viparīta-jñāna (knowing a thing as the opposite of what it really is), etc. Karma is what is performed by the body, the senses, or the mind, whether good or bad. Doing anything unintentionally is vāsanā. Ruci is the inordinate desire created by vāsanā. Through bhakti and prapatti and the consequent grace of God, these bondages are destroyed.

The last tattva is acit or prakṛti. It is the insentient substance out of which this material universe is evolved. It is ever changing and can never be the substratum of knowledge. It is of two kinds: śuddha-sattva and miśrasattva. The first is the material which is absolutely free from rajas and tamas, which is eternal, which is not subject to karma but only to the will of God. It is the substance out of which all things in Vaikuṅṭha (which is called nityavibhūti, as opposed to this temporal world, called līlā-vibhūti) are made. The second, viz ., miśra-sattva, comprises the three guṇas-sattva, rajas, and tamas. It is this which is evolved as this universe.

Out of these, Brahman or Īśvara is the independent reality, and the other two are dependent realities which inhere in him by the principle of sāmānādhikaraṇya. Just as skin, flesh, seed, colour, taste, and smell can all exist in the same mango simultaneously, so also cit and acit can exist in the one Brahman.

## MEANS OF LIBERATION

The mumukṣus, or those desirous of liberation, have to know three things: tattva or Reality, hita or the means of attaining that Reality, and puruṣāratha or the nature of attainment. Of these, tattva has already been described.

As regards the hita, the scriptures have described it in various ways. These things can be grouped under five headings, and are consequently known as 'arthapañcaka.' They are: sva-svarūpa (one's own nature), parasvarūpa (nature of God), puruṣārtha-svarūpa (nature of the four ends in life), upāya-svarūpa (nature of the means to liberation), and virodhi-svarūpa (nature of the obstacles in spiritual path).

Out of these, the first two have already been delineated while describing the tattvatraya. Puruṣārthas, or the things desired for by men, are four in number: dharma (practice of righteousness); artha (economic gain); kāma (enjoyments of the pleasures of life); and mokṣa (freedom from saṁsāra). Of these, the mumukṣu should know that the real puruṣārtha is mokṣa.

Upāya, or the means of liberation, is fivefold: karma, jñāna, bhakti, prapatti, and ācāryābhimāna. Karma includes all such acts like yajña, dāna, sandhyā, pañcayajñas, dhyāna, tīrthayātrā, etc. Jñāna or Jñāna-yoga consists of self-renouncement (vairāgya) and ceaseless practice of contemplation on Lord Nārāyaṇa. This leads to the realization of the Self, but not to that of the Lord.

The next step is bhakti. Bhakti or Bhaktiyoga marks the consummation of moral and spiritual endeavour as attained in the other two yogas. The Viśiṣṭādvaita constructs a ladder, as it were, from ethics to religion and from religion to mystic union.

The seven aids to bhakti are: viveka (purification of the body as the living temple of God); vimoka (inner detachment); abhyāsa (ceaseless practice of the selfpresence of God as the inner Self); kriyā (service to all beings); kalyāṇa (practice of virtues); anavasāda (freedom from despair); and anuddharṣa (absence of exultation).

Prapatti is complete self-surrender, and is meant for those who are unable to follow either Karma-yoga, Jñānayoga, or Bhakti-yoga. Its main characteristics are: to conceive what is in conformity with the will of God; to reject what is disagreeable to him; to have firm faith that he will save; to seek him alone as the protector; and to surrender one's self to him in all meekness.

Ācāryābhimāna is strong faith in the guru and his affectionate attachment to the disciple.

The obstacles to the spiritual path (virodhi), which are the last of the arthapañcaka, are again fivefold: obstacle to the realization of the Self; to the realization of God; to mokṣa; to the means of realization; and to the attainment of the goal.

## **STATE OF LIBERATION**

The liberated soul has a direct vision of Brahman in Vaikuṅṭha and is absorbed in the eternal bliss of union with him (sāyujya). To him the pluralistic world remains, but the pluralistic view is abolished. The distinction between him and Brahman still remains, and there is no loss of personality. He will continue for ever to enjoy this state of bliss by serving Brahman.

## **Conclusion**

Viśiṣṭādvaita is thus not a dry metaphysics, but a philosophy of religion. In it, reason and faith have been nicely synthesized. It guarantees the vision of God and salvation to all finite beings-human, subhuman, or celestial. The view that God is immanent in all for the purpose of cosmic redemption inspires the feeling that the God of all religions is ultimately one, though the various seers and sects may give different accounts of him.