

Vaisnava Philosophy of Ramanuja

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ABSTRACT: Ramanuja was the founder of Visistadvaitavada (qualified monism) in the Indian philosophy. He was the opponent of Sankaracharya and associated with the theistic and devotional school of Vaisnava sects. He describes God as self-luminous, everfree and as of the nature of consciousness. According to Ramanuja God is both saguna and nirguna. He accepts three realities cit, acit and Isvara. In this paper I am trying to discuss about the philosophy of Ramanuja by coating some references from visnupurana.

KEYWORDS: Ramauja, Sankara, Visnu, Narayana, Brahma, Saguna and Nirguna.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ramanuja (11th century A.D.) was the chief propounder of the doctrine of Visistadvaitavada (qualified monism). Ramanuja is said to be the true rival of Sankaracharya and preached his philosophical views with the aim of refuting the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankaracharya. He was associated with the theistic and devotional schools of Vaisnava sects. Hence, his God is a personified God.

According to Ramanuja, *Brahman* the Ultimate Reality is identified with Visnu or Narayana.¹ He is the receptacle of all the noble qualities. He is *Purusottama*, the Supreme Person. Ramanuja does not conform to Sankaracharya's view that *nirguna Brahman* is the Ultimate Reality. For him, God or qualified *Brahman* is the absolute. He says that the etymology of the word *Brahman* suggests that He is the Highest Person, who is by nature, devoid of all evils and is possessed of hosts of auspicious qualities which are innumerable and unsurpassed in excellence.² *Brahman* is devoid of *vijatiya* (heterogeneous) and *sajatiya* (homogeneous) distinctions, but has its internal distinctions. So it is said that *Brahman* is an organic whole with self (*cit*) and matter (*acit*) forming the part of this whole. Hence, Ramanuja's *Brahman* is non-dual (*advaita*) but is qualified (*visista*) by matter and self.³ That is why his view is called Visistadvaita.

Ramanuja describes God as self-luminous, everfree and as of the nature of consciousness. He is both *saguna* and *nirguna*. He is *saguna* because He possesses innumerable auspicious qualities. He is omniscient, omnipotent and all-powerful. Supporting the Upanisadic view Ramanuja says that *Brahman* is *satya* (real), *jnana* (conscious) and *ananta* (infinite).⁴ *Brahman* is also *nirguna*. But according to him, *nirguna* does not mean devoid of all qualities; it only means that *Brahman* is devoid of all defects and inauspicious qualities.⁵ Thought God is one, He manifests Himself in five forms, viz., *Antaryamin*, *Para*, *Vyuha*, *Vibhva* and *Arcavatara*. *Brahman* is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe. For this purpose He reveals Himself through four *Vyuhas*, viz., Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The different incarnations of God is called *Vibhava*.

Ramanuja accepts three realities: *cit*, *acit* and *Isvara*. But though equality real, the first two are absolutely dependent upon God, who is their controller (*niyamaka*).⁶ In Ramanuja's view, *cit* and *acit* form the body of God; He is the self. Matter and selves are the parts of *Isvara*.⁷ The relation of *cit* and *acit* with *Isvara* is inseparable (*aprthaksiddhi*).⁸ Ramanuja says that just as the material body does not affect the self, in the same way God is not touched by the imperfections of the world consisting of matter and spirit.⁹

God is the cause of the universe. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. According to Ramanuja, *Brahman* is not only the cause; He is also the effect itself. The world remains in a subtle form in *Brahman*. This is His *Karanavastha*, i.e., the causal state. At the time of creation this subtle world becomes manifested as *nama* (name) and *rupa* (form). This is His *Karyavastha* or the effect state.¹⁰ This universe being a creation of God cannot be false. Again, Ramanuja holds that like Brahman, the individual selves are also eternal. The *jiva* is not identical with *Brahman*, but a part thereof. They are like sparks of fire, which come out of *Brahman*. The *jiva* is the agent and enjoyer.

Liberation, according to Ramanuja, is the release of the self from the limiting barriers. The released self attains the nature of *Brahman*. It does not become identical with God, but maintains its difference from Him. It attains all the perfections of the supreme self except in two points, viz., it has no power over creation process and it is of atomic size. In liberation the *jiva* realizes itself as the body of *Brahman*.¹¹

Ramanuja is a votary of *bhakti* or devotion. He maintains that liberation is attained not by *jnana* (knowledge) and *karman* (action), but by *bhakti* (devotion) and *prasada* (grace). He concedes that *karma* and *jnana* lead to *bhakti*. According to Ramanuja *bhakti* is of two types *vaidhi* and *mukhya*. The former is lower and is identified with *upasana*.¹² The higher or *mukhya bhakti* is actually a special kind of knowledge, which can be attained only by the grace (*prasada*)

of God. Ramanuja gives emphasis on *prapatti* also as a means of liberation. It means complete self-surrender to God.¹³ *Prapatti* is the easiest means of liberation and is open to all irrespective of caste or creed.

II. RAMANUJA AND THE VISNUPURANA

Ramanuja has been much influenced by the *VisnuPurana*. He has profusely referred to the *VisnuPurana* in order to prove his philosophical views. According to him, as the Puranas are the *upabrmhana* of the Vedas, so their authority must be accepted. As such he has quoted from the Puranas, especially the *VisnuPurana* and the *BhagavataPurana* whenever he gets the scope. He holds that this Purana being a *Sattvika* one is an authority for his *Visistadvaita* philosophy. In order to prove the nature of *Brahman* as *saguna* and possessing all good qualities Ramanuja has quoted a few verses from the *VisnuPurana*. These are –

atitasarvavarano 'khilatmatenastrtamyadbhuvanantarale //
samastakalyanagunatmakohi svasaktilesavrtabhutavargah /
*icchagrhitabhimatorudehahsamsadhitasajagaddhito' sau //*¹⁴
suddhemahavibhutyakhye pare brahmanivarttate/
*maitreyabhagavacchabdahsarakaranakarane //*¹⁵
evamesamahasabdobhagavanitisattama/
*paramabrahmahutasavyasudevasyananyatah //*¹⁶

Again the verses like –

parahpuranamparamahparamatmatmasamsthitah/
*rupavarnadinirddesavisesanavivarjitah //*¹⁷
apaksayavinasabhyamparinamarddhijanmabhih/
*varjitahsakyatevaktum yah sadastitikevalam //*¹⁸ etc. which appear as preaching qualitylessness of *Brahman*

are interpreted by Ramanuja as establishing the fact that *Brahman* is devoid of all bad or inauspicious qualities. He has also quoted the following verses from the *VisnuPurana*–

sarvatrasausamastancavasatyatretivaiyatah/
*tatahsavasudevetividvadbhiharipathyate //*¹⁹
tadbrahmaparamamnyamajamaksayamavyayam /
*ekasvarupancasadahebhavaccanirmalam //*²⁰
tadetatsarvamevasidvyaktavyaktasvarupavat /
*tathapurisarupenakalarupenacasthitam //*²¹
dverupebrahmanastasyamurtncamurtamevaca/
*ksarakarasvarupetesarvabhutesvavasthite //*²²
visnusaktihparaproktaksetrajnakhyatathapara /
avidyakarmmasamjnanyatrtriyasaktirisyate //
yayaksetrajasaktihsavestitanrpasarvvaga /
samsaratapanakhilanavapnotyanusantatan //
tayatirohitavaccasaktihksetrajasamjnita/
*sarvvabhutesubhupalataratamyenalaksyate //*²³

In Ramanuja's view all these verses of the *VisnuPurana* contribute to his view that God is the substratum of all auspicious qualities. He creates, sustains, destroys, enters into and regulates the world without any effort. All the *jivasi*, i.e., *cit* and the world i.e., *acit* actually constitute the body of God. *Cit* is nothing but the *Svarupa-sakti* (natural power) of God which when associated with *acit* gets the name *ksetrajna* and is endowed with good and bad actions. Thus, in his view, all these verses establish the fact that Supreme *Brahman* is endowed with adjectives and the world, being His power, cannot be false.²⁴ Ramanuja interprets the verses, which can be taken as preaching non-dualism, in such a way so that these also point to his Qualified Non-dualism. Thus, the verse '*jnanasvarupam*' etc.,²⁵ of the *VisnuPurana* does not establish *nirvisesa Brahman*, rather this verse describes the nature of *Paramatman* which exists as *ksetrajna* etc.²⁶ Other such verses are referred to by us in Chapter-IV and V of the present dissertation and explained in accordance to Ramanuja's view. Hence, these are not repeated here.

REFERENCES

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3. Ibid, 2.1.9
4. Ibid, 1.2.19
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22. Ibid, 1.22.53
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25. VP, 1.5.38
26. SB, 1.1.1, P. 237