

Almost sixty-four years ago the leading scholar and author of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy, Prof P. N. Srinivasachari complained that, ‘in contemporary Indian Philosophy, Vedānta is overweighed on the side of Advaita. The balance will be restored only when the other systems of Vedānta, notably that of Rāmānuja, are widely known and appreciated in the West as well as In the East.’

He maintained that for the purpose of a comparative study of Vedānta as a whole, Viśiṣṭādvaita must come ‘to its own in the world of modern Vedāntic thought as a Siddhānta as well as synthesis.’ (The philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita 1946 : XLVi-Vii, Adyar)

Now, I wish to make a similar plea for the Swāminārāyaṇa Vedānta system. It should come to its own in the world of Indian Vedāntic thought. From the very beginning, philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa is considered to be a part of Viśiṣṭādvaita of Śrī Rāmānuja because in the Śikṣāpatrī 121 Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa himself stated मतं विशिष्टाद्वैतं मे। Moreover in śloka 100 he declared Śrībhāṣya and Gītābhāṣya of Śrī Rāmānuja to be his अध्यात्मशास्त्र।

It is clear that Śrī Rāmānuja’s darśana had deep impact on all the Bhakti Vedānta Schools of India, including on Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism. The latter’s philosophy is nearest to that of Śrī Rāmānuja.

Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa accepts the realism of Śrī Rāmānuja, the differences between the sentient Īśvara and sentient Jīvas and sentient Īśvara and non-sentient jagat. He accepts that the differences are eternal, as Rāmānuja's theory but the most important acceptance by Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa of Śrī Rāmānuja is *Śarīra-Śarīrī Sambandha* and *Viśeṣaṇa Viśeṣya Sambandha*. Because there is clear difference between Īśvara and Jīva and Īśvara and jagat. The Īśvara is the controller and ruler; the latter (Jīva and jagat) are controlled and ruled. Even in the final liberation when released souls are in the abode of the God, the separate identity of mukta jīvas and Īśvara remain. To be free from fetters of Māyā aspirant should take the path of (1) devotion, and prapatti, which include the combination of karma (proper action) jñāna or knowledge and (2) prapatti or (the path) of total self-surrender to God, by considering Him to be the one and only refuge.

Due to the above-mentioned acceptance of Viśiṣṭādvaita's principles, almost all scholars, teachers, even practising people, and even the preachers have declared that Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism is almost entirely Viśiṣṭādvaita with little modification here and there. Śrī Harijīvandāsa Śāstrī, a scholar saint of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa vedānta Sanskr̥ta Pāthasālā was a student of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism scholar Pt. P. B. Aṇṇagarācārya wrote a book called Mānameyaprakāśika. In its very beginning śloka no. 6,7 and 8 he states his views on this matter.

श्रीरामानुजाचार्यैः श्रीभाष्यादिषु वर्णितः ।  
 विशिष्टाद्वैतसिद्धान्तः सर्वश्रुत्यन्तसम्मतः ॥ ६ ॥  
 स्वीकृतः स्वमतत्वेन शिक्षापत्र्यां समादरात् ।  
 भगवत्सहजानन्द स्वामिना येन हि स्वयम् ॥ ७ ॥  
 तत्सिद्धान्तानुसारेण मानमेयप्रकाशिकाम् ।  
 कुर्वते मे स भगवान् धियं शुद्धां प्रयच्छतु ॥ ८ ॥

When we come out from the Pāthasālā (Traditional Sanskr̥ta School) to university we find the same view being propagated. Prof. Yajnik, another practicing scholar in his book, 'The philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa states 'Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism is in essence Viśiṣṭādvaitism. (Yajnik 1972 : 123)'

Prof. (Dr.) Ramesh Dave, again <sup>a</sup> great practising scholar of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism, calls the philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa Navya Viśiṣṭādvaita! The title of his thesis and book is Navya Viśiṣṭādvaita - The Vedānta philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa.

Following the above three scholars, most of the writers term the philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as Navya Viśiṣṭādvaita ! This view and nomenclature to the philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa requires further and in-depth study. I, in the beginning of this thesis briefly stated the influence of Śrī Rāmānujācārya on all-major Bhakti Vedānta Schools and concluded that that they were directly and greatly inspired and influenced by the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and Vaiṣṇavism of Śrī Rāmānujācārya. Yet each of them is known by its independent nomenclature. So, why philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa with its totally new concepts of Akṣarabrahman, Upāsanā, Bhagvad-Niṣṭhā, Ekāntika Dharma and Ekāntiki Bhakti should not have its own relevant name representing its core philosophy.

Three pillars of philosophical inquiry in Indian tradition are Tattva, Hita and Puruṣārtha, the truth, the way and the goal.

The first includes the ontological entities or ultimate truth.

The second discusses the means by which the Jīva or Individual soul reaches the ultimate destiny.

The third shows what is the final goal or purpose of human life.

About these basic three concepts there are vital differences between the views of Śrī Rāmānuja and Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa. The former accepts three basic realities Cit, Acit, Īśvara. The latter believes firmly that there are five. Jīva, Īśvara, Māyā, Brahman and Parabrahman. The last two are extremely important at every step in Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa mata (religion) and Darśana (philosophy).

The means to reach the ultimate in Śrī Rāmānuja are Jñāna or the way of knowledge karma or the way of action, Bhakti or the way of

devotion and prapatti the way of self-surrender. They are of course not exclusive. Jñāna leads to bhakti and bhakti to karma. भक्तिरूपापन्नं ज्ञानम्। This karma should results in service to God without expectation of anything but God's Kṛpā or grace. The endeavour should end with the absolute unqualified self-surrender to God or prapatti.

The four ways in Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism are (1) Dharma (2) Jñāna (3) Vairāgya and (4) Bhakti.

- 1) Dharma is appropriate good behaviour.
- 2) Jnana is the knowledge of self, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.
- 3) Vairāgya is detachment from everything and attachment to God.
- 4) Bhakti is devotion, full of love for God.

All these must end in Ekāntika Dharma, which is the same as Ekāntikī Bhakti.

For this, what is the most important is Upāsanā. This is the most Important philosophical framework and concept of sādhanā, containing an outline of the fundamental principles of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa faith. It explains both the philosophical understanding of the nature of God, Akṣarabrahman and jīva as well as the mode and method of worship.

In nutshell it states that every aspirant should know himself or herself as atman and not body. Then he should find and surrender to Akṣaraguru or parama Ekāntika Satpuruṣa, serve him, cultivate the virtues he possesses, become brahmanised and continue to offer devotion to God. Such and aspirant are as good as a released soul jīvana mukta. This connotation of Upāsanā is not the same as Śrī Rāmānuja's concept of Upāsanā. In Viśiṣṭādvaita Upāsanā, Dhyāna *Smṛti Santati*, *Vedanā* and *Darśana* are the same as Bhakti. Here in Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism it is absolutely unique.

**The Puruṣārtha :** The goal or the final target for all Indian bhakti Vedānta schools is *Mukti* or *Mokṣa*. In Śrī Rāmānuja's view jīvanmukti is

not possible. In Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa view it is very much possible and we have many examples of living released souls or muktas. Śrī Rāmānuja states even if there are reference to jīvanmukti in the scriptures they are to be understood as indicatory only.

जीवनमुक्तादिशब्दः क्वचिदुपचरितस्तत्समावश्ययैव । (तत्त्वमुक्ताकलाप : २-७३)

अमुक्तोऽपि मुक्तसमो जीवन्मुक्तः (तत्त्वमुक्ताकलाप : २-७३)

Thus, when Tattva, Hita and Puruṣārtha all differ in these two systems why try to name Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa philosophy by the add-on name of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Why call it Navya-Viśiṣṭādvaita ? We have good terms for Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism. It can be called Brahma-Parabrahma Darśana or Brahmaparabrahmādvaita or simply Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa Darśana.

