

## Background

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The critical study of Śrī Harivākyasudhāsindhu (HVSS), a Sanskr̥ta scripture of the Swāminārāyaṇa faith is done from ‘emic’ rather than ‘etic’ point of view. The term ‘emic’ refers to the insider’s perspective while ‘etic’ refers to the view of someone outside the given tradition.

The purpose is to give as precise a term as possible for the philosophy and religion Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as reflected in the foundational work of the faith namely the Vacanāmṛtam (VAC) and its Sanskr̥ta version Śrī Harivākyasudhāsindhu (HVSS).

Here an attempt is made to define and understand Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism, as an independent and separate Bhakti Vedānta School though aligned to the other prevailing Vaishnavite faiths of India. The work is the Sanskr̥ta translation in verse of the original Gujarātī foundational text of the faith in prose, called the Vacanāmṛtam. There is also its very important commentary (Tīkā) called Setumālā (SM). Both give innovative interpretation to the philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa.

While the author of the HVSS is Śrī Śātānanda Muni, a contemporary, disciple-scholar-saint of the founder, that of Setumālā Tīkā is Śrī Raghuvīrajī Mahārāja, the nephew of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa. He was the first ācārya of the Vadatāla diocese.

Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism like Hinduism, of which it is a part, combines philosophy and religion. There is a well-known statement quoted by Vedānta Deśika in Sarvārtha-siddhi on Tattva-muktā-kalāpa.

हतं ज्ञानं क्रियाहीनं हता चाज्ञानिनां क्रिया।[SS II/33]

Mere knowledge - speculative thinking - intellectual exercise without it being put into action or practice is useless. Any action - rite or ritual performed without knowledge of its purport is fruitless. Philosophy is mainly based on the knowledge while religion on the rites, rituals, and practice; both depend on each other to be meaningful. Thinking is limitless, action has limits.

### Importance of Religion

It is said in the Mīmāṃsā Darśana भारतीयानामस्माकमृषिवंशप्रसूतानामाचारे पारतन्त्र्यम् विचारे स्वातन्त्र्यम्। 'In code of conduct, in moral and ethical behavior, we the Indians born in the family of sages i.e., ṛṣis, are bound by rules of action and prevailing behavioral laws, but in thinking and theorising we are free, totally free. Therefore, in India there are innumerable Hindu religions, faiths, and creeds with equally huge number of gods and goddesses.

Majority of Indians even at the beginning of the twenty first century are quite religious. An exclusive opinion poll on 'Religiosity in India' was carried out across India's ten major cities in November 2006 by Times News Network and was published on the first page by Times of India (Ahmedabad Edition) on Sunday, November 26, 2006. As per this survey 92 % of all respondents said they believed in God either strongly or somewhat mildly. The proportion of the strongly believing among them was 75 %. God, according to them, is not a micro-manager but *He is seen as the Creator, controlling macro affairs like the cycle of life and death and rotation of the earth.* 90 % of the people said that they visit place of worship. 83 % said they pray at home.

The headline of the paper 'Figuring out Faith' sums up the religious attitude of Indians. *'A billion people, almost as many creeds. Welcome to India, the land of faith, where each one defines what is his or her faith.'*

Śrī Śatānanda Muni expressed the same idea almost two hundred years ago.

भजनेच्छाऽत्र सर्वेषां कृष्णस्य हृदि वर्तते।  
तथापि तत्तज्ज्ञाने तु वर्तते भिन्नभिन्नता।

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‘Every one in his heart has desire to worship God (Kṛṣṇa) but there is diversity in its comprehension.’

This diversity in religiosity is due to विचारे स्वातन्त्र्यम् or the freedom to think, choose and express. It is based on two basic Hindu doctrines: that God or Brahman is within everything and can therefore appear everywhere and that whosoever is born in India is essentially a Hindu. [Eschmann, Kulke, Tripathi 1986 : 79]

At the same time there is आचारे पारतन्त्र्यम् i.e. action, behaviour is dependent on law. Compliance with the code of conduct is necessary for stability and development of all. It is said: आचारः प्रथमो धर्मः i.e., good and moral conduct is the first discipline. It is a defining factor for Hindus. ‘A Hindu may be a theist, pantheist, atheist, communist and may believe whatever he likes, but what makes him into a Hindu are the ritual practices he performs and the rules to which he adheres, in short what he does.’ [Staal 1989 : 389] Good behaviour or action is itself known as sacred law or ‘Dharma’. धर्मो ज्ञेयः सदाचारः [SP : 103] This Dharma in its most general sense is for the well being of all, here and hereafter. From it flows progress and freedom in this world and the next. यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयसः सिद्धिः स धर्मः। It is, therefore, necessary to accept and act as per the prevailing behavioural law for the well being of individuals, society, state and human race. There has to be governance of and compliance with law. पाल्या विधिनिषेधाख्या मर्यादा च मनीषिभिः। [HVSS 42 : 47] The dos and don'ts prescribed by the scripture should be observed by even intellectuals.

Well known French indologist Louis Renou in his short survey on Hinduism wrote, “Hinduism, however except perhaps in certain Tantric systems - is not esoteric (not a secret doctrine for a few selected and initiated only) by the very fact that there is possibility of choice among diverse paths and various techniques. Spiritual immediacy is widely distributed. Immediacy of spirituality is its quality of something real and

important, so that a person feels involved in it. The mystic path is open to everyone. In its purest form, this religion becomes a type of wisdom. It is as wisdom that we should like to define Hinduism rather than by the equivocal term spirituality.”<sup>1</sup> Truth for Hinduism is an indivisible treasure. This wisdom is based on that truth which always triumphs.<sup>2</sup>

To acquire this wisdom, our sages, ṛṣis, granted us freedom to open all doors and windows for knowledge to come in. The R̥gveda says आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।<sup>3</sup> ‘Let wise and auspicious ideas come to us from the whole world.’ This attitude of inclusion based on free thinking is the ultimate value of our culture unlike that of the western civilisation that considers morality, not freedom, to be the highest value for man, which lies in the exercise of man’s reason and subjugation of his passion.<sup>4</sup>

This way of keeping the mind open to consider opposite or different views and to give options is the ultimate value in our Darśana. Indian philosophy does in fact elevate freedom to a super eminent position above morality.

Thus the ultimate value, recognised by classical Hinduism in its most sophisticated sources, is not morality but freedom, as epitomised in the famous statement of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that occurs at the very end of the Bhagavadgītā. After explaining all possible ways of action, knowledge and devotion for salvation or mokṣa to Arjuna, who considers himself to be His student and disciple [शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम्॥ B.G. 2/7], the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: “I have given you the knowledge which is the mystery of mysteries (the secret of all secrets). Analyse it thoroughly and then do what you wish.” [इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया। विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥,]<sup>5</sup> To conclude the most important sermon with such a grant of genuine choice, of freedom or option by the Primal God [‘Ādidevaḥ’ B.G. 11/37] to his devotee and disciple is rare to find in the basic scripture of any Semitic religion.

This truly religious democratic attitude encouraged innumerable initiatives, resulting into the diversity of religious beliefs and practices on

such a huge scale that a millennium ago the Islamic scholar, Al-Bīrunī made a distinction between the views of the Hindu philosophers and those of the ordinary people;<sup>6</sup> in the case of the former he thought he could find similarity with his own monotheistic belief. He may or may not be correct in his assessment but what is significant is the fact that we have an early recognition - a thousand years ago - by a stranger, from a different faith and culture, of both the diversity of Hinduism and its unifying factors. Behind these unifying factors is the freedom of thought, choice, expression and of practice of religion. Together, they form a part of ancient wisdom and heritage of this vast land that Louis Renou talks about.

Of course, Hinduism is not a monolithic concept. Like the great ocean, it assumes many forms, different in compositions, yet it is one, bearing the same name Ratnākara, the mine of pearls, since ages.

The most fundamental characteristic of what we call Hinduism is 'the open-texture' or 'porosity' of its innumerable philosophical terms, and key-concepts, which are continuously employed in most of its religious and philosophical texts since ancient times by the sages, seers teachers and writers.

### **Open Texture**

We find open texture and vatic style in the Saṁhitā texts, Prasthāna-traya works like the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtra and the Bhagavadgītā, the main books of Śaḍḍarśana and other philosophical works. We detect it even in comparatively recent works like the Vacanāmṛtam which is the scripture of an individual Hindu religion i.e. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism and in its Sanskr̥ta translation Śrī Harivākyasudhāsindhu. Thus we find 'open texture' and vatic (prophetic) style in almost all philosophical works.

'Open texture' is a term that suggests that there are many basic philosophical terms which do not possess one, fixed meaning for all times. They carry unavoidable possibility under which there would be no right or precise answer to the question of whether they are correctly applied. Friedrich Waismann [1896-1959], an Austrian philosopher of the

famous Vienna Circle who introduced this very important notion into the philosophy of language, states 'open texture means porosity. It is not vagueness but it is more like the possibility of vagueness.'

Terms when originally used might not be vague but due to progress in a particular field of knowledge it may become so. For example the term 'mother' was never vague until the advent of test-tube fertilisation. Biological mother or biological motherhood was a very precise term but now its 'open texture', possibility of its vagueness, is revealed. Whom shall we call a mother in case of a test-tube baby? The mother that produced an ovum or the mother that carried the fertilised foetus in her womb? Perhaps both these women can rightly be called the 'mother' of the same child. It is fruitless to pursue the question as to who is the 'real' mother, because the term 'mother' is not adapted to give a precise decision in the new circumstances. It can be said that the concept always had hidden open texture, as it could not provide in advance for all such possible new development and situations.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned above most of our authoritative religious and philosophical texts frequently use very important key words like, 'Akṣara', 'Brahman', 'Puruṣa', 'Jīva', 'Īśvara', 'Māyā-Prakṛti', 'Upāsana' not only in their etymological sense but also in many other senses. In short, they have enormous open texture or porosity. I think they are the seed sresponsible for birth of various faiths, including that of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism.

But one of the most frequently used porous terms is Hinduism. It is almost impossible to give an accurate definition of Hinduism. The topic is being discussed seriously in the national and international seminars since at least last twenty years. The IX European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies was held at Wilhelmsfeld near Heidelberg in Germany 1986 to discuss this term. The topic was 'Hinduism Reconsidered'. There, Prof. Dr. Heinrich von Stietencron, who favoured the use of term 'Hinduism' but in a much broader sense, presented the most radical reconsideration of Hinduism. In his research paper, *'Hinduism: on the proper use of a*

*deceptive term*' he stated, that 'even the most important "essential elements"' of Hinduism, that is, (1) recognition of the Vedas (as the highest spiritual authority) (2) belief in reincarnation, (3) doctrine of karman and (4) the hierarchical caste structure do not apply to all sections of Hinduism. Hinduism, therefore, by itself can't be called a historical religion. *But its distinct entities, the so-called sects, do* [Sontheimer, 1991 : 2]. *It means the Hindu Sampradāyas, are definitely religions.*

There are other difficulties about defining 'Hinduism'. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism and Semitic religions like Christianity, or Islam, 'Hinduism does not have a specific single, historical founder. It does not have a united belief system expressed in a Declaration of Faith nor single system of soteriology; it does not have a centralised authority and bureaucratic structure. It is, therefore, a very different kind of religion in these respects from the monotheistic western traditions of Christianity and Islam, though there are arguably stronger affinities with Judaism' [Flood 1998 : 6].

As a result, even learned western scholars and professors of religion in prestigious universities abroad sometimes give strange and shocking definition of Hinduism. Dr. John (Jack) Stratton Hawley, Professor of religion at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, wrote : 'Hinduism' - the word and perhaps reality too - was born in the 19th century, a notorious illegitimate child. The father was middle class British and the mother of course, was India. The circumstances of conception are not altogether clear' ['Naming Hinduism' an article in 'The Wilson Quarterly', Summer, 1991, Page No. 21].

There are of course strong defenders of the use of this term. 'Do we have to reject the term Hinduism because its various definitions have failed ? Or deny it the status of religion ? Asks Dr. Gabriella Eichinger Ferro Luzzi, a well-know Italian anthropologist and a lecturer of Tamil Culture at the Institute of Linguistics, University of Bologna. She then replies in negative and puts the blame not on the term Hinduism but on the 'western' conviction that all concepts can be defined and that they

must have common attributes and clear-cut boundaries. She bases her arguments on Wittgenstein's discovery that a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing holds concepts together. A family resemblance may exist among their members i.e. concepts. These are called polythetic concepts, which cannot be defined but only exemplified [Sontheimer, 1991: 5].

Similarly, well-known Indian anthropologist Prof. S. N. Srinivas stated: 'It is impossible to define Hinduism because there are no beliefs or institutions which are common to all Hindus and which mark them off from others. *Yet, it is not very difficult to identify a person as a Hindu* [Srinivas, 1960 : 574, 575].

Prof. Stietencron explains why we should take Hinduism as the embracing term for a group of religions rather than for a single religion containing an open variety of concepts and modes of action? Why the distinct entities of Hinduism, the so-called sects, the Sampradāyas are religions in narrow historical sense while Hinduism is not so in that restricted sense?

'He declares: 'The answer is simple : Terms are intended for clear communication. Their purpose is to evoke in the listener a specific notion, the same notion the speaker has in mind and which should correspond to the reality, which is to be conveyed. Therefore, much of our intellectual and academic exchange depends on the choice of terms and on their capacity to convey specific information with a reasonable amount of clarity. If everyone can derive different sets of meaning from the terms 'Hinduism' and 'religion', these terms obviously fail to serve their purpose.

Our term 'religion' has two different meanings: one general and one specific. Religion (singular) is a general term applied to human attempts to communicate with the divine on all levels and at all times. As a concept it presumes cross-cultural universals (nature, essence) in human nature. Universals are the supposed references of general terms [Honderich,



1995 : 887] Religions (plural) - are concretisations of religious systems in space and time with structural similarity and, therefore, they are distinct historical phenomena and among these each single religion is defined by a specifying term such as Greek religion, Roman religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Shintoism, or religion of the Incas, the North American Indians, etc.

The term Hinduism is mostly used in the first sense. With its various contradicting systems and the resulting inconsistencies it certainly does not meet the fundamental requirements for a historical religion with a coherent system; *but its distinct faith are religions*. They, like Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism, indeed, are religions similar to Christianity and Islam.

‘If the above argument is correct, is it necessary to abandon the term ‘Hinduism’ altogether? I do not think so, nor would it be easy to weed out a term that has been established worldwide. The term ‘Hinduism’ can be retained, but with a shift in meaning. It is not one religion, but a group of distinct Indian religions. Once this connotation is accepted, we can go a step further and realise the enormous challenge, which Hinduism, as a matter of fact, offers, to the other world religions today. *For, in Hinduism it was possible to create a culture of accepted multiformity, able to develop generous liberality and tolerance between religions and ideologies to a degree which civilisation based on Judaism, Christianity and Islam were never able to achieve*’ [Sontheimer, 1991 : 20-21].

Thus, Hinduism is a mosaic of theology and philosophy, it is a salad-bowl of many items, in the form of the various Sampradāyas and belief- systems in which each one is separate and independent yet together they enhance the value of each other while giving freedom of choice to the aspirant. Every Hindu religion, each Hindu faith and school of thought, be it monist, monotheistic, dualist atheistic etc., made stimulating contribution independently towards development and growth of Hinduism. It is, therefore, futile to try to reduce a dynamic and independent religion like Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism into an offshoot or

segment of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism by giving it an add-on name of Navyaviśiṣṭādvaita, especially when it differs from the Viśiṣṭādvaita on all the three basic concepts of Tatva, Hita and Puruṣārtha i.e. ultimate Reality, means to achieve the supreme goal of life and the goal of human endeavour.

### **Two Pillars of Hinduism - Bhakti and Saṁnyāsa**

A number of new faiths or Sampradāyas gained prominence when Bhakti and Saṁnyāsa, devotion and renunciation, became popular as new approaches to salvation. Out of these, non-dualist Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, based mainly on bhakti and dualist Śaivism called Śaiva Siddhanta based generally on rituals cum asceticism, and the eclectic Smārta faith based on household worship of five gods and smṛti texts emerged as dominant religious forces.

Like other bhakti and ascetic religions, they have a monotheistic doctrine in spite of the apparent plurality of existing gods. In each of these religions there is only one Highest God, only one Ultimate Reality. Other gods are godlings. Some Sampradāyas do call them īśvaras. They belong to lower levels of existence. They often simply represent manifestations or different divine functions of the One Deity. They are dependant on that Highest God's will and are subject to birth, death, rebirth and salvation. This applies to the often-cited concept of the trimūrti also, which was sometimes adduced to prove the identity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, the three major Hindu gods, and, therefore, of the trinity of Hindu religion. But the real picture as given by the texts in different Sampradāyas is very different: in each of the great Sampradāyas it is its own God who is the One and the Supreme, the only eternal all-powerful being. Viṣṇu for the Vaiṣṇavas; Sadāśiva or Paramaśiva by the Śaivas, Ādyāśakti by the Śāktas or Swāminārāyaṇa by the followers of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya calls him Puruṣottama. As a matter of fact He is called the Avatārī, the source of all incantations. He cannot be compared with other incarnations.

हेतुः सर्वविताराणां सोऽवतार्येव वर्तते।  
इति ज्ञेयो न चैवान्यैरवातरैः समो हरिः ॥ १४ ॥

HVSS : 142 / 14

This One God performs the functions of creator, preserver and destroyer of the world through Muḷa Puruṣa and Muḷa Māyā-Prakṛti, Vairāta-Puruṣa, Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Ananta (according to Śaiva Siddhānta). It is He who manifests Himself in all these divine forms, and only in this respect, they are similar in nature to Him, sometimes bordering on identity.

But this partial manifestation of God's universal power in three functional aspects of creation, preservation and destruction does not belong to the level of transcendental ultimate being of the Deity. It occurs only at a relatively inferior level in the creative process, which leads from unity to multiplicity, a level on which the world and the living beings already take shape with final name and form. On this relatively low level, the three gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as members of the trimūrti exist for a span of time and then vanish again. But the Highest God, the all-pervading Viṣṇu, or all-embracing Śiva or all encompassing Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa is far beyond this functional trimūrti according to the respective followers of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Swāminārāyaṇism. There are many divine functions with a name given to each, but in theology monotheism remains strictly intact and unimpaired.

### **Multiformity, Liberality and Monotheism of Hindu Faiths**

Due to increasing influence of the monotheistic approach many formerly independent faiths have been subsumed into Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism in course of time. It makes an interesting reading to go through Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar's well-known book 'Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems' [1982]. Its chapters II to XIV describe how the independent faiths of Nārāyaṇa, the Sātvatas, Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, etc. merged into Vaiṣṇavism. Similarly faiths such as Māheśvaras, Pāśupatas, Kālāmukhas, Kāpālas, Vīraśaivasas, became part and parcel of Śaivism [Bhandarkar 1982 : 169-173].

Just as the process of this merger of local and tribal faiths in the above-mentioned two major religious streams is interesting, so is the process of emergence of new religions or Saṁpradāyas from these very important religions. Examples of two of the emergent faiths will be relevant here, because both of them are vibrant and living. They are Smārta Vedāntism and Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism. The former is closely aligned with Śaivism and the Advaita philosophy of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and the latter with Vaiṣṇavism and the Viśiṣṭādvaita of Śrī Rāmānujācārya. But, neither is strictly orthodox, exclusive, or sectarian, though staunch followers may feel otherwise.

‘Śrī Rāmānujācārya himself belonged to the Vaḍama subcaste of Brahmins. Many of this group (even) today are Smārta Brahmins. They are neither sectarian Śaivites nor sectarian Vaiṣṇavas. They honour five chief Hindu deities, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa and Sūrya. Each family or individual is free to choose one of these five deities and direct most of his worship to that God. At the present time all Smārta Brahmins in South India are in principle followers of the Advaita philosophy of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, according to which the true Brahman (the Highest Reality) lies beyond the conception of any personal Lord.

The majority of them are devotees of Śiva but they are not sectarian Śaivites; they are not initiated into a special sectarian community. To this day, a significant minority of Tamil Smārta Brahmins are devotees of Viṣṇu [Carman, 1981 : 28]. As a matter of fact from the sixth century (A.D.) onwards, an increasing number of Brahmins began to associate themselves with Bhakti movement [Vasudha et al, 2001 : 23]. Today, the community of Smārta Brahmins is very powerful and strong.

The Smārtas tried to combine some of the major bhakti elements with late Vedic sacraments and laws as embodied in the Smṛtis and with the monist Vedānta. While Swāminārāyaṇism successfully united the philosophical elements of Sāṅkhya, Yoga and Vedānta systems and religious elements from the Pāñcarātra, Swāminārāyaṇism has Dharma,

Jñāna, and Vairāgya as essential components, which form the Ekāntika Dharma or the Ekāntikī Bhakti that is the defining characteristic of the faith.

Like the Smārta Vedāntism, Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism believes in worship of five major Hindu gods. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa states in the Śikṣāpatrī.

विष्णुः शिवो गणपतिः पार्वती च दिवाकरः ।  
एताः पूज्यतया मान्या देवताः पञ्च मामकैः ॥

(शिक्षापत्री, ८४)

“My followers should respectfully worship Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Śiva, Śakti and Gaṇapati. [S.P. 84].

Thus, while the Smārta tradition is surely connected with Śaivism, the Swāminārāyaṇism is associated with Vaiṣṇavism and is sometimes known as the Uddhava Saṁpradāya. Both are an eclectic combination resulting from various Hindu traditions with new ideas and ideals. Both these new Hindu faiths, like others of medieval and modern times, tried to unify or reconcile differing elements of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism in their own. Similarly, several syncretistic religions have originated and grown important in India in the course of history. It must be added that, indigenous religions in general developed resilience during the long period of foreign domination, when Hindus had to put aside religious differences and support each other in order to survive. Yet each retained its basic identity.

Each of the major Saṁpradāya has a history of its own, and with its growth has split up in subdivision. But each one possesses its own set of revealed Holy Scriptures recognised by all its members. Each of the literate Hindu religions has its own clearly identifiable and often immensely extensive theological literature, each is proud of its great saints, its major ācāryas. For the followers of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism the Holy Scriptures are the Vacanāmṛtam and the Śikṣāpatrī. The great saints are Guṇatītānanda Swāmī, Gopālānanda Swāmī, Muktānanda Swāmī, Nityānanda Swāmī, Śukānanda Swāmī and Brahmānanda Swāmī, etc.

Each follower of the Saṁpradāya worships the same God as the Highest Deity. While the followers of Vaiṣṇavism worship Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu, those of Śaiva Siddhānta and the Smārtas worship Sadāśiva, and the followers of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism worship Swāminārāyaṇa Himself as the Highest Lord.

### **Asceticism and Devotionalism Among the Smārta and Swāminārāyaṇa Faiths**

The followers of Śaivism generally give importance to asceticism, those of Viṣṇu put emphasis on bhakti. These two concepts are very important in Hinduism. They are vital means of salvation depending on proper understanding of these two terms. Though the emphasis here is on Saṁpradāya, these two components may be seen to entail other aspects of culture, e.g., social, physical, linguistic, philosophical and ideological ones.

On one hand, it seems, there is a basic ontological and theological incompatibility between asceticism and devotionalism as a means for liberation because saṁnyāsa is the means of salvation through complete cessation from worldly activities, while devotionalism or Bhakti is the means of salvation through activities related to God, to earn His grace which is to be achieved by one of the nine methods (Navadhā Bhakti) ending in total surrender (Prapatti).

On the other hand, it is possible to understand that both can be complementary i.e., together they can be very helpful to an aspirant, a Mumukṣu, as their combined impact is much more powerful to reach the final liberation than that of either asceticism or devotionalism individually.

In the Śikṣāpatrī, which is a basic book of conduct for the followers of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism, the definitions of Bhakti and Vairāgya (on which asceticism is based) are very similar and are given together in verse no. 103 and 104 as follow.

- (1) Bhakti or devotion is deeply felt love for God (Kṛṣṇa) based on the understanding of His greatness.

माहात्म्यज्ञानयुक्भूरिस्नेहो भक्तिश्च माधवे। (शिक्षापत्री, १०३)

- (2) *Vairāgya* or non-attachment (the root of asceticism) is total detachment from every one and everything that is not intimately associated with God Kṛṣṇa.

वैराज्यं ज्ञेयमप्रीतिः श्रीकृष्णेतरवस्तुषु। (शिक्षापत्री, १०४)

In short a person on the path of liberation should, negatively remain away, detached, from worldly objects, relations, desires, activities etc. Positively, he should get himself totally attached to the God, after knowing His true greatness. The first is the path of *Vairāgya* or renunciation or asceticism, the second is the path of *Bhakti* or devotionism both can and do merge and lead to salvation.

### **Syncretism, Inclusivism, Asceticism and Devotionalism In Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Swāminārāyaṇism**

Because most of the Hindu Saṁpradāyas are syncretistic the institution of renunciation is found to be present in many bhakti faiths while deeply devotional songs - Bhajans - Stotras - are composed and sung by the founders and the advocates of ascetic faiths like Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and others. Just as philosophical system of the Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śuddhādvaita, Acintyābhedaḥbhedā are branches of Vaiṣṇavism with Bhagawān Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa or Vāsudeva or Kṛṣṇa at the centre for *mokṣa*, Pāśupata, Lakuleśa, Śaiva and Kāpālīka faiths (according to Purāṇas) or Pāśupata, Śaivas, Kāpālīkas and Kālāmukhas [according to Śrī Bhāṣya, II/2/37], are based on meditation and asceticism with Lord Śiva or Śakti at the centre and pivot, for liberation. They are branches of Śaivism. The stotras-prayers full of love for the God or the Goddess are composed and sung by the followers of Kevalādvaita philosophy.

While it is well known that there are many hymns to Lord Viṣṇu, full of bhakti or adoration in the Saṁhitā literature there are also hymns addressed to the central figure of asceticism namely Rudra in the Ṛgveda, in the Mandala I/43, I/114 and II/33/1:7. He is the roarer, brown, (babhṛ) with a black or red black cloth. He is ferocious, destructive Lord of the

storm gods - Maruts. He attacks like a wild beast yet *he is also the benevolent healer and cooler of diseases* [Flood, 1998 : 151].

There is not much of adoration or devotion here. But, immediately thereafter, in the 'Śatarudrīya' which occurs both in the black and white Yajurveda (Tatittirīya IV/5/1 and Vājasaneyī Samhitā XVI/1-16) he is praised in glowing terms as merciful, giver of boons, the heavenly healer.

The Śatarudrīya is one of the earliest books of holy Names of God to be recited daily for the final freedom. Chanting or singing of the divine names of a deity - स्तोत्र - स्तवन - is an essential path of श्रवण and कीर्तनभक्ति that leads to salvation. कलौ केशवकीर्तनात् (मुक्तिः)। By the first few centuries of current era, the recitation of the Śatarudrīya was claimed in the Jābāla Upaniṣad, as the road to immortality. [Jābāla Upaniṣad, III/66]. The Śatarudrīya is often referred in the Śaiva Purāṇas as the most important work for mokṣa. The European indologist and Vedic scholar Jan Gonda praised it and wrote an article on Śatarudrīya in a commemoration volume, Sanskr̥ta and Indian studies: 'The hymn is still recited in Śaiva temples today' [Nagatomi, Matilal, Masson, 1979 : 75-91].

We can see the powerful impact of bhakti in the literature of the ascetic Śaiva Sampradāya right from Śatarudrīya to 'Śivapañcākṣārastotra', 'Śivamānasapūja', 'Śivatāndavastotra', all three ascribed to Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and in the most popular 'Śivamahimnahstotra' of Śrī Puṣpadanta.

However, genuine bhakti concept requires a permanent and final distinction between the devotee and the God in this world and in the next, which is the divine residence of God. This concept is acknowledged and accepted by both 'Śaivasidhānta Darśana' of South India and 'Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa Darśana'. The former is the most important, normative form of Śaivism.<sup>8</sup> It is opposed to the monistic belief of Kashmir Śaivism that holds the tenet of identity of the 'Pati' (Lord Śiva) the Paśu (individual soul) and the Pāśa (the bond or universe). The Kashmir Śaivism is monistic and believes in the identity of the Pati or Lord (Śiva) the Paśu (the individual soul) and the Pāśa (the bond or universe).



The Śaiva Siddhānta on the other hand maintains that there is an eternal distinction between the Lord (Pati Sadāśiva), the soul (Paśu) and the paśa i.e., mental and material world which binds all souls.

A soul is entangled in the unconscious material universe by impurity (maḥa), by action (karma) and consequence (karmaphala), by Māyā and by the Lord's power and will. It is eventually liberated from this entanglement by ritual and essentially by Śiva's grace.

If we use the word Viṣṇu in place of Śiva, we can have Vaiṣṇavism here in place of the Śaiva Siddhānta. In short, the philosophy, the concepts, the methods, and the means are very similar; only the name of the God is different. This is effected with the help of methods called 'inklusionismus.'

This is a term, which Paul Hacker<sup>9</sup> uses to describe theology and philosophical ideas expressed in holy texts. Halbfass W., Oberhammer G. and Wezler have reviewed Hacker's views.<sup>10</sup> According to Wezler, inklusionismus mainly implies a relationship between the old and the new tradition and change that leads to taking over the new without radically abandoning the old.

This is exactly what we find in the philosophy and religions of Śaiva Siddhānta and Swāminārāyaṇism. Lord Swāminārāyaṇa accepted Śruti Prāmāṇya, all important Smṛtis and yet created many new concepts, ideas that helped the faith to be one of the most progressive in modern India.

He employed two hundred years ago the method which is now called 'Sanskritisation' by M. N. Srinivas.<sup>11</sup> It is a process by which a lower caste tries to raise its status and to achieve a higher position in the caste hierarchy. Sanskritisation can happen by adoption of vegetarianism, teetotalism, worship of Sanskritic deities, or employment of Brahmins for ritual purpose. Due to Sanskritisation a dynamic interrelation, encompassment between ideas and attitudes and notions of different faiths, about the Guru concepts we have *the Vedānta of New Hinduism*.<sup>12</sup>

Sanskritisation can refer to ritual and custom, ideas and beliefs, as well as to the pantheon. The material to which it applies consists of non-Sanskritic gods, beliefs, and rituals, e.g., the worship of village deities, ancestors, trees, rivers, mountains, and generally local cults. *Sanskritisation happens at the expense of non-Sanskritic elements.*<sup>13</sup>

Before the advent of Swāminārāyaṇism in Gujarāta, a large number of people used to worship ghosts, ancestors, village deities, and believed in whatever the local practitioners called 'Bhuvās', 'Bhagatas', told them. This resulted into untold miseries. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa brought change slowly but surely with this Sanskritisation. The lower castes and tribes climbed higher levels in social status in the Swāminārāyaṇa faith as 'satsangis', the followers. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa and the ascetic masters in the pupillary tradition accepted and respected them. This tradition still continues.

However it is difficulty to believe that Sanskritisation happens always at the expense of non-Sanskritic elements. Prof. Marriott McKim disagrees with Srinivas. He states in Village India [McKim 1965: 171-222]<sup>14</sup> that Sanskritisation does not necessarily take place at the expense of the non-Sanskritic elements. Identification of a local deity with a major universal deity is one of the main methods of Sanskritisation. As a matter of fact not only a local divinity but also even great ācāryas are identified with gods. Ādi Śaṅkarācārya is identified with Śiva. Śrī Caitanya with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Rāmānanda with Śrī Rāma, Śrī Rāmānujācārya with Ādiśeṣa, Śrī Nimbārkācārya with Sudarśana, Śrī Madhvācārya with Vāyu and Śrī Vallabhācārya with Agni [Swāmi Tapasyānanda, 1990 : 107]. As matter of fact, it is a standard practice to elevate the ācārya or the founder to the level of a god.

The emphasis of the Bhakti component is on devotion to *iṣṭadevatā*, 'apersonal, single god' who on his part yearns for his disciple's or a devotee's pure love and attestation which are emphasised, even if the God tends to be transcendent and is in His divine abode as in the more

philosophical or 'intellectual' bhakti of the Bhagavadgītā. The spontaneous, emotional bhakti movements of the Vaiṣṇava Aḷvārs and Śaiva Nayanars of Tamilnadu, Vīraśaivas of Karnataka and bhakti saints of Maharashtra also reject and transcend caste barriers and the scriptural *karmakāṇḍa*, at least initially. It is the sincerity of devotion expressed through song-poetry, dance (as in *kīrtans* and *bhajans*), and the proximity of community of saints, which matter, not the ritual as such. The realised saint or guru may become the mediator between the bhakta and God.<sup>15</sup> The Guru has the function similar to that of Śrī, Sītā, Rādhā, or Pārvatī. According to Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, the God or the Guru - a realised saint, is always present on the earth to help the devotees.

जीवानां भारते वर्षे नरदेहोपलम्भनम्।  
यदा भवेत्तदा कश्चिद्यतेत श्रेयसे सुधीः ॥ ४ ॥  
साक्षात्कृष्णोऽथ वा तस्य भक्ताः श्रेयस्करा नृणां।  
भवेयुरेव धर्मिष्ठा यत्र कुत्रापि भूतले ॥ ५ ॥

HVSS 219 : 4-5

Right from the earliest period, we have two clear ways or means to know and reach the highest principle or Personal God; the path of active participation and path of renunciation.

They are again divided into two psychological approaches, the emotional, approach of love and affection for God (Bhakti) and rational approach to knowledge of the highest relinquishment and withdrawal (Vairāgya).

We, therefore, due to the concept of *vicāre svātantryam*, gave freedom to every man to understand God in his own way. Indian society did not impose its standards on private conscience.

We have from time immemorial, mainly two types of sages, seers and teachers. One group emphasises the path of Bhakti as well as all types of activities focused on Personal God, remaining very much in the society, celebrating life through music, dance, art, festivals and temples. It turns common mundane life into an unending protracted festival of joy.

The other group believes in giving up attachment and connection with the family, village and society as a whole to concentrate on the Ultimate Principle and to give importance to the path of knowledge, of secession and withdrawal. This is the path of renunciation, asceticism and monasticism.

In fact, the institution of renunciation is found to be present in some bhakti sects whereas it is found to be rejected by others. For example, the followers of *Rāmānandapantha*, the *Kabīrapantha* and the *Dādūpantha* offer the option of renunciation to their followers; against this, Vallabhācārya's *Puṣṭimārga* is a laicistic faith, and the Caitanya (Gaudīya) *Sampradāya* is basically so, too. Although the Caitanya *Sampradāya* has monks and nuns in its following, they have a somewhat marginal status as compared with the core of the sect, the families of *Gosvāmīs*, who are householders and heirs to the original line of tradition.

Thus we have the *Rṣi saṁskṛti* or the tradition of sages who were householders. The Vallabha *Sampradāya* is its best example. It follows the path of godly activities or *Bhakti*, while remaining within the family. The Yati or *Sādhu saṁskṛti* of ascetics who gave up family ties and lived life alone in groups but without raising family is followed generally by the Smārtas. The Buddhist, the Jain, the Nātha *Sampradāya* and many other groups also followed this path of renunciation.

Between these two, we have many faiths that trade on the middle path. They follow both the paths with different degrees of importance. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and other schools of Bhakti Vedānta have both types of followers and devotees. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa gave almost equal importance to both these paths and had large numbers of ascetics as well as householders as followers.

### **Aims and objects of Asceticism and Devotionalism**

Asceticism (*tapas*) and renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) and resulting "sectarian movements" constitute another component of syncretism. Asceticism and abstinence may have various aims, e.g., the achievement of the heightening of life-potentiality by the tapasvin, like the demon who performs tapas to

obtain a boon of immortality from God (like Rāvaṇa). This kind of *tapas* brings the practitioner or “yogi” closer to the “warrior.” [Piatigorsky 1985 : 229] <sup>16</sup> Often juxtaposed in folk religion, both achieve superhuman feats. <sup>17</sup> Whereas in folk religion the aim of *tapas* is to acquire supernormal powers, side-by-side we find the effort to ethicise and spiritualise *tapas* to please the God or the God-realised sage or guru. <sup>18</sup>

The aim of asceticism may also be to renounce the life of the householder and caste. According to the *Dharmaśāstras* the ascetic renounces family and property, though not the world emanating from Brahman; this he internalises. <sup>19</sup> Standing apart from ordinary society, generally, the ascetic lives wandering life in the wilderness, at least during the initial phase of his career; he is beyond the plurality of phenomena and sees the unity of man, though he may visualise the *Jīvas* caught in the cycle of rebirths as bound by their *karman*. He brings the unity of *Ātman* and Brahman. His discipline (*tapas*) may involve a wandering life in the forest (*vanavāsa*) just as Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa wandered for seven years and walked twelve thousand Kilometers. Another example is of Cakradhara whose travel lasted for twelve years, in the forest before he reemerged and attracted followers who eventually formed the “Mahānubhāva-sect”. <sup>20</sup>

The preconditions of their focus and insights are not the performance of the *karmakāṇḍa* of the *Dharmaśāstra* but self-discipline and the pursuit of such ethical principles as *dama*, *satya*, *akrodha*, and *dayā*. *Ahiṃsā* was another principle, which was born in the realm of the ascetic renouncer who lived in harmony with the animals of the forest. The ascetic’s *dharma*s also found way as the *sādhāraṇa dharma*s in the *Dharmaśāstra*. Although they were subordinated to *varṇa dharma*s, they made life in the *kṣetra* tolerable and acceptable, and made the *varṇa* ideology a viable proposition.

### Comparison of Bhakti and Asceticism as parts of Syncretism

‘Indian religions have had their strongest proponents both in their laity advocates and roving ascetics’ wrote Louis Dumont,<sup>21</sup> who heightened our awareness of this fact, in a seminal contribution to the theme of renunciation contrasted saṁnyāsa with the practice of bhakti. He says that in bhakti “renunciation is transcended by being internalised; in order to escape the determinism of actions, inactivity is no longer necessary, detachment and disinterestedness are sufficient. One can leave the world from within, and God Himself is not bound by His acts, for He acts only out of love. Devotion has come to take the place of deliverance”<sup>22</sup> and, in the case of bhakti, the renouncer is socially absorbed in the life of the man-in-the-world.<sup>23</sup>

As far as it refers to the central concept of bhakti, this statement is correct; however, it turns out to be strangely ineffectual as we look at the reality of bhakti.

### Bhakti and Saṁnyāsa

All bhakti sects do, indeed, agree that salvation is attainable at any stage of life because it is bestowed upon the individual as an act of divine grace. Nonetheless, all these sects arising in the middle and modern ages were confronted with the institution of renunciation, as it existed then. As we shall see, it was not so much renunciation in itself that bhakti religion rejected but the soteriological and ontological concept on which saṁnyāsa relies heavily. It was this concept that was found to be incompatible with bhakti according to certain ācāryas.

Saṁnyāsa is said to be based on the concept that *liberation cannot be attained unless one gives up the life of a householder*. The timeless, primordial status of being cannot, according to this concept, be attained within the caste-bound, ritual-bound relative status of a householder. A saṁnyāsī candidate has to die to the world during the various steps of his initiation into saṁnyāsa. However, it is not a negative status as understood by some ācāryas but it is a positive one since an aspirant

ritually appropriates the world of householder by internalising the householder's sacrificial fires, which constitute the central symbol of a householder's life. The saṁnyāsī becomes the repository of the whole world, here and beyond. He becomes the cosmic person himself. According to some early injunctions, he should roam about solitarily carrying the whole world with himself. Saṁnyāsa is to be an absolute state of freedom and perfect being. Against this, no bhakti follower can claim such a status, be he layman or monk. This would run counter to the principle of the Supreme Being's free grace which can be granted to anyone, householder and renouncer alike. Liberation granted in the process of bhakti cannot be confined to a ritual process. A bhakti devotee who is possessed by fervent devotion dies to the world too, but in so dying he cannot claim to possess an absolute status inaccessible to those who remain alive in the world.

The conceptually based adversity to saṁnyāsa of the orthodox type is expressed by its most shrewd critic Vallabhācārya as mentioned above, who opines about saṁnyāsa and bhakti in his treatise Saṁnyāsanirṇaya. It is the fourteenth book of a group of sixteen-called Śoḍaśagranthāḥ, in the following words :

॥ अथ श्रीसंन्यासनिर्णयग्रन्थः ॥

पश्चात्तापनिवृत्त्यर्थं परित्यागो विचार्यते।  
 स मार्गद्वितये प्रोक्तो भक्तौ ज्ञाने विशेषतः ॥ १ ॥  
 कर्ममार्गे न कर्तव्यः सुतरां कलिकालतः।  
 अत आदौ भक्तिमार्गे कर्तव्यत्वाद्विचारणा ॥ २ ॥  
 श्रवणादिप्रवृत्त्यर्थं कर्तव्यत्वेन नेष्यते।  
 सहायसङ्गसाध्यत्वात् साधनानां च रक्षणात् ॥ ३ ॥  
 अभिमानान्नियोगाच्च तद्धर्मैश्च विरोधतः।  
 ----- ॥ ४ ॥

विरहानुभवार्थं तु परित्यागः प्रशस्यते।  
 स्वीयबन्धनिवृत्त्यर्थं वेषः सोऽत्र न चान्यथा ॥ ५ ॥  
 अतः कलौ स संन्यासः पश्चात्तापाय नान्यथा।  
 पाषण्डित्वं भवेच्चापि तस्माज्ज्ञाने न संन्यसेत् ॥ १६ ॥

“In ‘*karma mārga*’, *saṁnyāsa* should not be taken especially in the *Kaliyuga*. In *bhakti mārga* it should not be taken in the *sādhana* stage for the convenience of *śravaṇa bhakti* etc (*navadhā bhakti*). It can only be taken up in the *bhāvanātmaka bhakti mārga* for realisation of the separation of thousands of years from the Lord. In the *jñān mārga saṁnyāsa* it is not desirable either in the beginning or in the final stage.

It cannot be accepted that one should undergo *saṁnyāsa* in order to become accomplished in the nine fold practice of *bhakti*, for the practice of the nine-fold *bhakti* must be observed in the company of helpful people and it must be observed continually. Moreover, because there is pride inherent in *saṁnyāsa*, and specific duties are imposed upon a *saṁnyāsī*, the two religious systems are incompatible.

Śrī Vallabha emphasises two aspects of *bhakti* that are at variance with the principle of *saṁnyāsa*. *Bhakti* is a type religion wherein the devotee relies on the community of fellow-devotees who all work in common towards their spiritual betterment, whereas *saṁnyāsa* cannot be anything but a solitary affair. *Samnyāsa*, Śrī Vallabha says, brings about conceit and a host of religious duties (such as the regimen of begging, roaming about, etc.), whereas *bhakti* means complete surrender to the Supreme Being and therefore rules out all other commitments.

The last-mentioned point that Vallabha makes is directed against the practice of *saṁnyāsa*, which produces conceit instead of non-attachment and an involvement in all sorts of religious duties in the name of liberation. More than one of the commentators on Vallabha’s text, has interpreted this point in fundamentally conceptual way. In doing so, they once again underline the basic theological difference between *saṁnyāsa* and *bhakti* practice. One of them Cācā Śrīgopeśa says :

संन्यासग्रहणानन्तरं तत्त्वमस्यादिवाक्यादात्मनि सोऽहमित्यभिमानो भवति।

(चाचा श्रीगोपेश, षोडशग्रन्थाः)

‘When one embraces *saṁnyāsa* there arises conceit-ego in oneself. This is brought about by the *mahāvākyas* like *tat tvam asi* etc.’ Whereas, in the path of *bhakti* as soon as one has dedicated oneself totally to God,



there arises dependence of one's whole personality (*deha*), of one's life and senses, on God, and therefore, due to one's subservience to God, there cannot be any conceit.

A little further on, in the same context, he defines further what it is that a devotee gives to God and contrasts it with *saṁnyāsa*: it is *parityāga*, giving oneself in an act of total dedication (*sarvasamarpaṇarūpa*). Finally, in the same paragraph he states that without the feeling of subservience to God, the devotee would be unable to perform the service of God.

The theologians of the *Puṣṭimārga* do not denounce *saṁnyāsa* because of its insincere enactment but because they flatly deny that the concept of *saṁnyāsa* is valid. I think that the *bhakti* approach to religion on the whole as explained by *Puṣṭimārgīya* writers, would not be in total agreement with philosophy of many founders of Bhakti Vedānta School.

Almost all the great ācāryas took *saṁnyāsa* including Śrī Vallabhācārya either at the end of life or earlier.

- (1) 'At the age of fifty-two Śrī Vallabhācārya burnt his *parṇakutir* (hut), joined the *saṁnyāsāśrama* (became an ascetic) and came to Benares (Vārāṇasī - Kāśī). For a month he observed fast and for the last eight days he observed mauna-vrata (silence) and on the second day of the bright half of Āṣāḍha, Śaṁvat 1587 he left this world in the mid-day.' [Mishrā, 1980 : 158, citing Telivala M.T.'s Introduction to Śrīmad-Brahmasūtrāṇubhāṣyam]
- (2) According to Caitanyacaritrāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj, Śrī Caitanya (1486-1533) wanted to accept *saṁnyāsa* from Keśava Bhāratī of Katva who refused because Kṛṣṇaprem Nimāi (Śrī Caitanya) was already greater than himself. But nothing would deter Nimāi. By very great persuasion and the intensity of his spirit of renunciation, he was able to overcome the unwillingness of Keśava Bhāratī who at last initiated him in to *saṁnyāsa*. He gave him the name of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya - one who evoked the awareness or consciousness of Kṛṣṇa In the mind of men [Tapasyānanda, 1990 : 261].

- (3) Śrī Madhvācārya's who was known as Vāsudeva, Pūrṇaprajña and Ānandatīrtha 1238-1317 (CE) entered the order of *saṁnyāsa* at the age of sixteen. He was initiated by Acyutprekṣa [ Tapasyānanda, 1990 : 111 ].
- (4) Śrī Rāmānuja received the holy order of the *saṁnyāsīn* from the Lord Venkaṭa Himself by prostrating before and praying him, invest me with all the insignia of the Vaiṣṇava ascetics. And, he heard a voice, 'O my own Rāmānuja ! Don the robes of the saṁnyāsīn and serve me.' Rāmānuja became a *saṁnyāsī* from that day [ Yāmunacārya M., 1963 : 15 ].

There are cases of spontaneous *vairāgya* embraced by charismatic personalities. A striking case is that of the six first-generation Gosvāmīs of Caitanya's sect who were the first propounders of Caitanya's doctrines. All of them were renouncers. Similarly, other groups, however, in which the trend renunciation became institutionalised, developed regular *Vairāgīs*.

For new Saṁpradāya the charismatic influence of an outstanding *bhakta* - (a house holder or an ascetic) will prevail. It happened in the case of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and Śrī Vallabhācārya. If the founder would be a charismatic ascetic the rules for monastic life would evolve and also that there would be attempts to define the status of the renouncers as opposed to that of the laity. If the founder would be an Ideal householder for most of his life, the rules for the domestic and laical behaviour of the chief will be established.

In case of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, he remained celibate but never donned the saffron clothes. So also, his guru Rāmānanda Swāmī always wore white dress, though both of them had a number of ascetic followers. For Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa both ascetic and laity groups had almost equal access to God and liberation. For him the knowledge that, 'I am a servant of Lord - Who is everything' - is the most defining characteristic of a true aspirant. The position in and membership of a particular *āśrama* is of secondary importance.

देहत्रयपृथक्सत्तारूप आत्मैव केवलम्।  
 हरिदासोऽहमस्मीति वेदनं ज्ञानमुत्तमम् ॥ २१ ॥  
 एतज्ज्ञानवतः पुंसः प्रवृत्त्यध्वन्यपि क्वचित्।  
 कामादिविक्रिया नैव हृदि स्यादिति निश्चितम् ॥ २२ ॥  
 ज्ञानी स एव सर्वेभ्यो भक्तेभ्यः श्रेष्ठ उच्यते।  
 त्यागी सोऽस्त्वथवा गेही न विशेषोऽत्र कश्चन ॥ २३ ॥

HVSS 220 : 21-23

Both householder and ascetic followers can reach the highest state of freedom due to the self-realisation and the God realisation with the knowledge that all worldly objects are perishable. But it is possible for ascetics only to achieve the greatness and सिद्धदशा by the virtue of penance because the super natural powers to move in all the three worlds (the heaven, the earth and the nether world) come from penances only. Even a great householder like king Janaka cannot move in the heaven, nether world and everywhere like the Siddhapuruṣas namely Nārada, Śuka and Śanaka.

तप आदि वृद्ध्यभावाज्जनकस्यापि भूपतेः।  
 नासीत्सिद्धदशा किन्तु ज्ञानवृद्धिः समाधिना ॥ २० ॥  
 HVSS : 153 / 20

तप इति। भूपतेर्नृपत्वेन प्रवृत्तधर्मनिष्ठस्य। जनकस्यापि। तपआदिवृद्ध्यभावाद्धेतोः।  
 सिद्धदशा। नासीत्। किन्तु। समाधिना। ज्ञानवृद्धिः आसीत् ॥ १५३-२० ॥

सिद्धास्तु नारदशुकसनकादिसमा भुवि।  
 पाताले दिवि वा यान्ति स्वेच्छया धाम्नि चेश्वराः ॥ २१ ॥  
 HVSS : 153 / 21

सिद्धा इति नारदशुकसनकादिसमाः। सिद्धाः सिद्धदशां प्राप्ता भक्तास्तु। स्वेच्छया।  
 भुवि सप्तद्वीपादियुक्तायां पञ्चाशत्कोटिपरिमितायां पृथिव्याम्। अथवा। पाताले पातालान्तेषु  
 सप्तस्वपि भूविवरेषु। अथवा। दिवि स्वर्गादिसत्यान्तलोकेषु। ऐश्वरे परमेश्वरसम्बन्धिनि। धाम्नि  
 श्वेतद्वीपाव्याकृतवैकुण्ठगोलोकादिधामसु च। यान्ति ॥ १५३-२१ ॥

Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa had almost equal respect for Bhakti and Vairāgya as means to Mukti and also for laity and ascetic groups as both had resolute knowledge of the incarnate God in front of them. He was the object of their love, respect and reverence. If we look closely enough at bhakti texts and at the lives of the paragons of bhakti, we cannot help admitting that bhakti cannot lead aspirant anywhere but to withdrawal from the world like king Janaka (mentioned above in HVSS 153:20) who

was a ruler yet remained and lived like an ascetic. He tells Sulabhā, the female ascetic who had come to attract his attention.

असङ्गी निर्विकारोऽस्मि प्रवृत्त्यध्वस्थितोऽप्यहम् ।  
श्रुत्वेति तस्य वचनं विस्मिता साऽगमत्ततः ॥

HVSS 220 : 17

‘I am unaffected and undisturbed though I stay on the road of actions and activities. After hearing this statement, she went away from his court. This exactly is asceticism.’

For the time being, we can call this kind of withdrawal from the world that is caused by the spiritual struggle, ‘spontaneous individual renunciation’ in order to distinguish it from organised forms of renunciation. This kind of renunciation is brought about by a feeling of detestation of the world (*Nirveda*) or by a universal feeling of detachment (*Vairāgya*). The term *Vairāgya* is also used in *saṁnyāsa* texts where, too, it is called the prerequisite of renunciation. Besides this, *Vairāgya* has also assumed the meaning of institutionalised renunciation, i.e. monasticism both the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva monasticism.

It is true that the community aspects of bhakti practice counterpoise this tendency of detestation of the world. But, ultimately, in its most radical form, bhakti seems to be incompatible with life in the world. Most of the radical Bhaktas like Gopīs, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Mirābāī, Narsinhā Mehtā, Tukārāma, were all ‘mad’ in the eyes of the common people. In principle in bhakti renunciation is not a means to an end, namely final release but result of being irresistibly attracted to the object of one’s *bhakti* i.e. one’s *iṣṭadevatā*. When a Bhakta is pulled away from the world towards the chosen God, without care for anything or any one in the world that is itself renunciation.

Before proceeding to historical examples in evidence of this contention, let us just recall a passage from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa that forms classical example for all treatises on the effect of bhakti. In this passage the nine items of bhakti practice are described and the effect of this

practice on the devotees. In the last verse of the eleventh Adhyāya of Bhāgavatapurāṇam, ultimate state of bhakti is described as follows:

क्वचिद्वदन्त्यच्छ्रुतचिन्तया क्वचिद्वसन्ति नन्दन्ति वदन्त्यलौकिकाः ।

नृत्यन्ति गायन्त्यनुशीलयन्त्यजं भवन्ति तूष्णीं परमेत्य निर्वृताः ॥ ३२ ॥

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‘Thinking of the Lord they (i.e. the devotees) sometimes cry, sometimes they laugh, sometimes rejoice, sometimes talk, they are beyond the world (*alaukika*). They dance, they sing in praise of Him who was never born. They imitate Him, and are struck dumb; having reached the Highest One they are at peace.’

No matter how much we may like to consider *bhakti* as a religion that can be practiced by ‘leaving the world from within’, as Dumont put it, we have to take passages such as these seriously because of the outer behavior of these historical *bhaktas*. The majority of these men and women whose charisma had its source in mystic experience had a tendency to break away from the world just like ascetics. They were unconcerned and unhinged. Only they did not formally accepted asceticism.

They were mystic devotees immersed deeply in love of God. It is obvious that this mystic experience lies at the core of it all. As universally testified to by the mystics themselves, the moments of mystical union were and are neither producible nor reproducible at will. They are usually instantaneously brief. This briefness and spontaneity are two of the genuinely religious traits that distinguish them from all other sensations closely related to them. This is why the mystic’s career is set in the tension between the brief moments of mystic union and an ensuing incessant struggle for the renewal of the timeless state of union.

Even when the genuine mystic slips out of the state of union or *Samādhi* like condition and resumes his ordinary worldly life, he is unlikely to take a pre-mystic stance in approaching worldly matters. A mystic may be a householder like Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa but for all practical purpose he is an ascetic. Or he may insist in joining ascetic

order like Śrī Caitanya (1486-1533) quoted earlier, who broke away from his life as a householder and became a renunciate.

An especially interesting case of *vairāgya* depicted as the radical consequence of total *bhakti* is provided by a seemingly negative example of Vallabhācārya. Neither was he himself a renunciate, (except for the last few months of his life) nor are the monks in his *Sampradāya*. A very perceptive analysis, of which has been provided earlier.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike many other *bhakti* devotees, Vallabhācārya is not a *māyavādin* who denounces the world as illusory. The world is thought to be in God and is dependent on Him. God Kṛṣṇa is the life of the world and therefore the giver of life. In consequence of this, the family as the worldly source of life is considered good. Moreover, it provides the nucleus of the 'company of the righteous', that is, the community of devotees. Lastly, only in the state of a householder can one fulfill the temple ritual and become fit to partake of the *prasāda* (which is held to have already been enjoyed previously by God). On the other hand, Vallabha is also said to have originally the intention of remaining unmarried in the interest of undivided devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and, after having ultimately given into a divine ordinance to marry, to have embraced *vairāgya* in the very final stage of his life. This is said to have happened in the manner he himself had considered to be the only condition providing for renunciation. Vallabha teaches that renunciation is only acceptable if a person is drawn away from life towards Kṛṣṇa in a total act of *parityāga* (called *vyāsaṅga*, 'obsession').

In *bhakti* only God's grace is thought to be able to bestow liberation. *Liberation is not a ritual process but a lifelong struggle.* Moreover, the reward of *bhakti* is *bhakti* itself, that is, the experience of the divine. Liberation is considered to be of secondary importance.

### **Bhakti and institutionalised Vairāgya**

Just as there was a tradition of married leaders or founders of *bhakti* *sampradāya* becoming ascetics, there was a custom to appoint or accept a

householder as head of a faith having a big number of ascetic members. We have an example of the Gosvāmis of Caitanyite faith. Unlike the first six generations of Gosvāmis who were the renouncers the subsequent generations are the householders and the Caitanyite tradition is handed down within the various Gosvāmi families. They provide the hereditary custodianship of Caitanyite temples. There were other groups, however, in which the trend towards renunciation became institutionalised. They developed regular order of monks and nuns.

Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa inherited the group of sādhus from his guru Rāmānanda Swāmī. He gave *dikṣā* to five hundred persons in one single night at Phaṇeṇī. With the help of these sādhus he spread a message of the social and religious reform and organised a new religious community in Gujarāta. A major element of reform was the strict discipline he required of the band of ascetics who became his disciples. The disorder in Gujarātī society at the turn of the nineteenth century was reflected in the breakdown of ascetic discipline. Some men were banded together as ascetic warriors who hired themselves out to fight in the military conflicts even during the early years of British rule, especially in the princely states [Ghurye, 1964 : 112] They had a reputation for immorality as well as violence. In contrast to the others, Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa demanded of his ascetic followers a strict discipline of renunciation. They could not resort to violence, even in self-defense. They had to avoid all contact with women and money.

As would be expected, the charismatic influence of an outstanding bhakta will rarely prevail much longer than the first generation of a newly emerging sect. It would further be expected that rules for the monastic life would evolve and also that there would be attempts to define the status of the renouncers as opposed to that of the laity. For, it would seem reasonable to ask, if both monk and layman have equal access to grace, what difference would there be between them other than a differing claim to intensity of devotion. It is hard to make out an

essential soteriologically founded difference between them because of their ideologically ultimate unity and their operational duality.

The problem of *bhakti*, then, is that the basic idea of the freely accorded grace of God, in principle, annihilates the mutual antagonism of householder versus renouncer. We find in *bhakti* a conceptual egalitarian unity ('all men are dependent on God's grace'). Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa clearly states that even a householder with true *vairāgya* will definitely reach the abode of God when he gives up his body because he is without any attachment to any one except God.

गृहस्थो हरिभक्तस्तु देहान्ते ब्रह्मधाम सः ।  
निर्वासनांतरत्वात् सद्यः प्राप्स्यति निश्चितम् ॥ ११ ॥

HVSS 158 : 11

The householder devotee when free from *vāsanā* (all worldly desires) will certainly and immediately reach the abode of God - *Brahmadhāma* when he dies.

So, both an ascetic as well as a householder aspirant should consider himself as *ātman* only, separate and independent from three types of body (gross, subtle and casual - स्थूल, सूक्ष्म, कारण) and a devout follower. The difference between a householder and a renouncer is conceived of as an operational one (*vyāvahārika*). By the standard of supreme truth (*parama tattva*), they are identical though operationally separate.

A householder as described above is a *virakta* in spirit; an ascetic is a *virakta* in spirit and flesh. In practice – that is, specifically in the way householders and ascetics behave and interact – a clear-cut dual structure is superimposed and is at work. Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa opines that whatever is proper duty for a householder in day-to-day life is not proper for ascetics and vice versa.

तदन्ते सोऽब्रवीत्साधून्भक्ताः सन्ति हरेरिह ।  
त्यागिनो गृहिणश्चेति द्विविधा दृढनिश्चयाः ॥ ४ ॥  
तेषां धर्मस्तूभयेषां भवन्त्येव पृथक् पृथक् ।  
परस्परविरुद्धाश्च सन्ति तान्कतिचिद् ब्रुवे ॥ ५ ॥



..... ।  
एवमाचरणे

ज्ञेया

परस्परविरुद्धता ॥ १० ॥

HVSS 185 : 4-5,10

Thus the day-to-day behavioural laws of householder and ascetic devotees are separate and opposite. But both of them must have resolute understanding that the God is their only goal.

### **Vaiṣṇava Bhakti Movements and Śrī Rāmānujācārya**

The most influential formative and important of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas ācāryas was the Śrī Rāmānuja. He was the innovative authoritative teacher of the community and involved in the administration of the Śrī Rāngam temple. He lived from 1017 to 1137 A.D. The tradition says that Śrī Rāmānuja succeeded Śrī Yāmunācārya as a young man to the headship of Śrī Rāngam temple, the undoubted intellectual link by succession. Śrī Rāmānuja is said to have travelled throughout India to propagate and disseminate his system. According to tradition he had to retreat from Śrī Rāngam because of the hostility of the local ruler and went to Melukote in Kaṇṇāṭaka, where he organised a strong center of Śrī Vaiṣṇava learning.

Śrī Rāmānuja wrote nine works, according to a verse in the Divyasūricarita of Garuḍa Vāhana Paṇḍita. Though according to traditions he lectured in Tamil [Carman 81 : 49]. They all are in Sanskrit (a move away from the Ālvārs' use of Tamil) in the interests of a wider and more traditional audience. They consist of three major philosophical works (Śrībhāṣya, Gītābhāṣya, Vedārthasaṅgraha), two briefer commentaries (Vedāntadīpa and Vedāntasāra), three devotional works (Śaraṇāgatigadya, Śrīrāngagadya and Vaikunṭhagadya), on the theme of surrender to the deity and a manual of daily worship (Nityagrantha).

The first of Śrī Rāmānuja's three philosophical works, Śrībhāṣya, is designed to prove that the Upaniṣads do not teach the strict monism propounded by Śrī Śaṅkara and strives to integrate his Vedānta position with the devotion to a personal deity namely Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu.

Śrī Rāmānuja is a realist. His standpoint is essentially different from both Śrī Śaṅkara's and Śrī Bhāskara's in assigning a definite and ultimately valid reality to the world and its two components of non-sentient matter (*acit, prakṛti*) and soul (*cit, ātman*). This is most fully expressed in his doctrine that the deity stands to the world of Ātman and Prakṛti in the relation of a soul to the body, which forms its attribute. (*cit acit viśiṣṭa īśvaraḥ*) Śrī Rāmānuja develops this theme and other topics in his other two major philosophical works namely commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā and the *Vedārthasaṁgraha*.

### **The influence and impact of Śrī Rāmānuja on Bhakti Vedānta Schools**

There is little doubt that Śrī Rāmānuja inspired and influenced almost all other later Bhakti Vedānta Schools. He is the leading theistic interpreter of both the Brahmasūtra and the Gītā, whom all other theistic teachers and commentators accept as the authority. The later Vaiṣṇava schools had a lot to learn both in substances of their teachings and in the organisation of their faiths from him. His two major works Śrī Bhāṣya on the Brahmasūtra and the Bhāṣya on the Bhagavadgītā became foundational texts for almost all the later Bhakti Vedānta schools from 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The great success of his Śrī Bhāṣya created such an impact that every succeeding bhakti faith was forced to produce a Bhāṣya that would justify its independent theology and philosophy. Consequently we have Śrī Madhva's commentary (1230 c.e.) representing the Dvaita school, Śrī Viṣṇuswāmī's commentary (13<sup>th</sup> century) representing partially Dvaita and partially Śuddhādvaita system, Śrī Nimbark's commentary called Vedāntapārijātasaurabha, Aṇubhāṣya of Śrī Vallabhācārya, representing the Śuddhādvaita and Śrī Baladeva's Govindabhāṣya explaining Śrī Caitanya's philosophy. Similarly the philosophy of Śrī Rāmānuja also influenced the philosophy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa.

Basically, his philosophy expressed a religious reaction against Śrī Śaṅkara's monism. Śrī Rāmānuja wanted to show that there is clearly a

distinction between the individual self and the Ultimate Reality, in short between ātman (jīvātman) and Brahman (Parabrahman). This distinction is well accepted in our Upaniṣads. It makes sense of the religion of worship and devotion to which Śrī Rāmānuja was committed, for the devotee cannot think of the person whom he worships as identical with himself. A sense of separation and distinction is phenomenologically central to all Bhakti Schools of Vedānta.

Following is the central belief-system of all the Bhakti Vedānta schools that were influenced by the philosophy of Śrī Rāmānuja. He can be called the original exponent of Vaiṣṇavism.

1. The Supremacy of the Divine Personality who possesses human form, all auspicious celestial attributes and is devoid of all defects. This is well established in our scriptures. He is variously described as Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Puruṣottama, Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Hari, Śrī Hari or Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa.
2. The Divine Person, God of gods is equated with the Absolute Parabrahman of the Upaniṣads.
3. There is no Absolute beyond and above this Divine Person.
4. The creation is real as is Māyā, which is the divine power of God.
5. *Bhakti* or Devotion, in the form of humble, intense love or total surrender to the Supreme Divine Person, is the most important means of final liberation or mukti. It can be practised by all without distinction of class, caste, creed, gender, age or station of life.
6. Divine grace of the Supreme Person can untie hold and fetter of all *karma* or action and grant final freedom.
7. This final freedom or liberation is not mere removal of ignorance and dawn of knowledge that I am Brahman and merger of an individual soul into Brahman. It is attaining the divine body and status, similar to that of the Supreme and stay in His abode and to serve Him there. It can be Sālokya, Sāmīpya, Sārūpya or Sāyujya i.e. enjoying the

company of the Supreme Being in His abode remaining in His proximity, having similar divine form and attributes and serving Him. Remaining in these conditions only give real unalloyed joy to a devotee and not the merger with the Impersonal Supreme.<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned above these are essential and substantial aspects of the belief system of all the Bhakti Vedānta Schools of India that were mostly actuated by Śrī Rāmānuja and his immediate followers of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

Because these teachings are theological they required the support and advocacy of a powerful, coherent, consistent metaphysics to establish their reliability as *darśana* in the eyes of the scholars, pandits of India. No other works than the philosophical writings of Śrī Rāmānuja gave this very badly required support to all the subsequent schools.

He, from his profound study of the scriptures, knew perfectly well that the Upaniṣads don't have one world-view. At least there were two fundamentally different and distinct currents of thoughts in the ancient Upaniṣads. One represented Absolute idealism that was mainly accepted, explored and propagated by Śrī Śaṅkara. He focused only on those statements in the Upaniṣads that described the Ultimate as *Nirguṇa*, *Nirākāra* and *Nirviśeṣa* i.e. without any forms and attributes.

Śrī Śaṅkara accepted the doctrine of *Māyā*, the indescribable one as the cause of the worldly creation and the identity and the merger of the individual soul with the Brahman, after the removal of the veil of ignorance, called *avidyā*, as the final liberation or *mokṣa*.

But the in-depth study of the ancient Upaniṣads as a whole, and of the Brahmasūtra, convinced Śrī Rāmānuja that the Vedānta or Upaniṣads has also another quite different and equally valid view which regards the Absolute Reality as the Supreme Person, the Adorable Being, the Loving God, the Absolute in the true sense of the word. He is the Real of all reals. God is the Protector of all beings, dwells in the heart of man. Seeing Him, as He is, and everywhere, is eternal bliss and this is to be attained by contemplation of Him and then total surrender to Him. This

will purify the soul. Due to the purification of the soul, in that blissful condition, it attains perfect similarity with the Supreme Soul, enabling him to serve God permanently in His divine abode.

Now let us see the impact of Śrī Rāmānuja's philosophy specifically on some of the leading schools of Vaiṣṇavism, because Śrī Rāmānuja was the original exponent of Vaiṣṇavism both as a school of philosophy and theological system.<sup>26</sup>

1. **Śrī Nimbārka's Bhedābheda-vāda Philosophy and Haṁsa Sampradāya :** Śrī Nimbārka developed the Vaiṣṇava faith under the name of *Haṁsa Sampradāya* or Śrī Santakumāra - Nārada Sampradāya.<sup>26</sup> This faith is similar in several respects to that of Śrī Rāmānuja. He maintains that Brahman is Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, possessing the six principal attributes and many other divine qualities. He was also influenced by the Pāñcarātra and accepted *prapatti* as a means of *mokṣa*. According to him the *jīvas* (individual souls) are both different from and identical with the Brahman. Their identity is only in the remote sense in as much as the individual selves cannot have any separate existence apart from the Brahman. (Tadāyatta-sthiti-pūrvikā). Like Śrī Rāmānuja he does not accept the concept of pure qualityless Brahman because it is impossible that such Brahman can be the locus of even an illusion. Illusion takes place only when the object is known in a general way. Again according to him, following Śrī Rāmānuja, the bondage and its destruction are real not illusory.

But the most important concept of Śrī Rāmānuja that Śrī Nimbārka accepts is that of *dharmabhūtajñāna*. He states that all the *Jīvas* are atomic in size and can cognize various sensations taking place in various parts of the body through all-pervasive knowledge which exists in them as their attribute this is *jñānaśakti* i.e., *dharmabhūtajñāna*. This concept of knowledge as an inseparable quality of the *Jīva* is known as *aprthakasiddha* a very important tenet of Śrī Rāmānuja's school. Again, according to Śrī Nimbārka, though emancipated soul feels

himself to be one with God, still there is a difference between him and God. This again echoes Śrī Rāmānuja's views.

2. **Śrī Madhvācārya's Dvaita Philosophy and Brahma Sampradāya (thirteenth century) :** Śrī Madhvācārya established the Dvaita School of Bhakti Vedānta. Born two centuries after Śrī Rāmānuja, he was a strong believer in the Vaiṣṇava theism. He has undoubtedly developed the *Bhakti* movement, initiated by Śrī Rāmānuja and strengthened it by asserting that Śrī Viṣṇu is the very Brahman and *Bhakti* or supreme devotion to Him is the means to Mokṣa. Thus, liberation is the self's enjoyment of its innate being, consciousness and bliss (*saccidānanda*). It is a participation in the bliss of the Lord, attained through devotion (*Bhakti*) to an icon and His grace. [Flood, 1998:246] Śrī Madhva holds Pāñcarātra Āgama in high esteem. Basically the Vaiṣṇavism of Śrī Madhva is not very different from that of Śrī Rāmānuja though there are some doctrinal differences in respect of some of the theological details.<sup>27</sup>
3. **Śrī Rāmānanda's Jānakīvallabha Sampradāya :** Śrī Rāmānanda (1300-1411CE) wrote Śrī Vaiṣṇavamātābjabhāskaram. This work shows how much he was influenced by the great Viśiṣṭādvaita scholar Śrī Pillailokācārya.<sup>28</sup> Śrī Rāmānanda was a student of Swāmī Rāghavānanda who himself was greatly influenced by his contemporary acāryās of South Indian Vaiṣṇavism. For Śrī Rāmānanda, Śrī Rāma is the Supreme Brahman. He totally accepts Tattvatraya and Rahasyatraya works of the South Indian Vaiṣṇava tradition. The only difference is that he substitutes the word Sītā for Śrī (Lakṣmī) and Rāma for Nārāyaṇa in the *Aṣṭākṣarāī* and *Dvaya* mantras. He clearly states that Sītā is the *Puruṣakāra* (interceder and mediatrix of grace) between Rāma and aspirant. Thus he was 'deeply influence by the teachings of Śrī Rāmānuja and spread the universal gospel of Bhakti.'<sup>29</sup>

Again, following South Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, he starts his Guruparamparā with salutation to the Prathamācārya but his

Prathamācārya is Sītā and not Śrī or Lakṣmī According to him *Bhakti* is the devotees' attitude as a humble servant to the master rather than as a lover to the beloved. Hence, Hanumān is held as the example of the true devotee who offered unqualified service to Śrī Rāma.<sup>30</sup> This clearly indicates the influence of Śrī Rāmānuja.

#### 4. Śrī Vallabha's Śuddhādvaita Philosophy and Rudra Sampradāya :

Śrī Vallabha (1479–1531 CE). Śrī Vallabhācārya, like Śrī Rāmānuja believes that Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā constitute only one science. It is explained in the Brahmasutra संहितं एतत् शारीरकं जैमिनीयेन। He agrees with Śrī Vaiṣṇavism regarding the existence of Personal God. God cannot be known by perception or inference. He can be known by the scriptural authority only, by *Śabda Pramāṇa*. *Jivas* are many and of atomic size. They are essentially identical with Brahman like the sparks, which are identical with the big fire. The Parabrahman of the Upaniṣads is Bhagwān of Bhāgavata Purāṇa i.e. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme God who stays in *Vyāpti Vaikunṭha*. He can be reached only by Puṣṭi Bhakti.

Śrī Puruṣottama of Śuddhādvaita who wrote a commentary on Aṇubhāṣya has severely criticised Śrī Śaṅkara's Kevalādvaita. His criticism is very similar to that of Śrī Rāmānuja both in contents and arrangements. Śrī Vallabha and his followers accept Māyā as power of Parabrahman and therefore viśeṣaṇa of God. God manifests Himself as many by this Māyā. This manifestation is real. It is neither confusion nor error nor a mistake. The world is indeed real because it is the manifestation of God Himself. For both Śrī Vallabha and Śrī Rāmānuja dream experiences are also real and true, being special creation of God. Bhakti is the only means of *Mukti*.

माहात्म्यज्ञानपूर्वस्तु सुद्रढः सर्वतोऽधिकः ।  
स्नेहो भक्तिरिति प्रोक्तस्तया मुक्तिर्न चान्यथा ॥<sup>31</sup>

The law of *karma* is dependent on God Kṛṣṇa and is dominated by His will. Whatever is said in *Śruti* and *Smṛti* is His word and

instruction only. Thus there are so many vital concepts where Śrī Vallabha follows Śrī Rāmānuja.

5. **Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya's Acintyabhedābheda Philosophy and Gaudīya Sampradāya :** Śrī Gaurāṅga or Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486 CE) established Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. He was Kṛṣṇa-intoxicated devotee and considered Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Absolute Parabrahman not an *Avatāra*. He can be reached through *prema bhakti*. He did not write any commentary on the Upaniṣads or the Bhagavadgītā. His followers Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrī Baladeva wrote the works on the philosophy of Śrī Caitanya. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī puts forward a very interesting argument for the nature or *Svarūpa* of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman of Upaniṣads.

He states that if the world is only a product of *māyā-avidyā* and if Brahman has nothing to do with it, why admit the existence of Brahman itself? Since Avidyā cannot exist without Brahman, we are forced to admit that it is one of the powers of Brahman. Now if it is argued that Brahman does not require *Avidyā* or *Māyā* for any purpose because it is *Swayamprakāśa* or self-illuminating, then it becomes qualified. It means he has the quality of self-illumination. Anyway it is not possible to accept qualityless, formless, *Ōirguṇa*, *Nirākāra* Brahman.

Following Śrī Rāmānuja he states that God has none of evil qualities. Jīva Gosvāmī holds that the power of consciousness (*citśakti*) is identical with the very essence of God. It is possible that there is difference between *Śakti* and *Śaktimān* but it is difficult to understand. Therefore it is called supra logical or Acintyabhedābheda.

According to Caitanya, Jīvas are totally different from God and from each other. Every *Jīva* is of atomic size and is characterised by "I" or "ego". It pervades entire body because of the quality of consciousness just as the sandal wood paste pervades the whole house with its fragrance. Consciousness is a quality of the self and it is



always dependent on it and serves its purpose. It can also contract and expand. This is nothing but *Dharmabhūtajñāna* of Śrī Rāmānuja.

One of the most important statements of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī is that a real Vaiṣṇava is not bothered whether the world is real or illusory. He is interested only in enjoying the delight of loving and serving lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Bhakti*, according to both Śrī Caitanya and Śrī Rāmānuja, is the center of all spiritual efforts. According to the former it can be *Vaidhī* or *Rāgānugā*, one that follows the methods given in the Śāstras or that which springs from the heart of a devotee. *Rāgānugā Bhakti* is the bhakti of Gopīs of Vṛndāvana. This is the ideal Bhakti.

Thus all the five Bhakti Vedānta schools mentioned above were directly and greatly inspired and influenced by the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy of Śrī Rāmānuja and yet each of them is known by its independent nomenclature.

#### Footnotes :

1. Sharma 2001 : 88
2. सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्। सत्येन पन्था विततो देवयानः।- मुण्डकोपनिषद् III / 1 / 6
3. Rv. I / 89 / 1
4. Potter 1965 : 2
5. BhG. 18 / 63
6. Sachau 1888 i : 22-23
7. Blackburn 1994 : 270, 397, Ted Honderich 1995: 635
8. Flood 1998 : 162, 163
9. HackerPaul, In Oberhammer 1983, pp.11-28
10. Oberhammer : 1983
11. Marriott McKim 1976 : 196
12. Cp.Derrett 1976 : 60f
13. Srinivas M. N. 1952; Staal 1963 : 261 ff
14. See summary in Staal 196 : 263 f
15. Vaudeville 1974 : 116f, 137
16. Piatigorsky 1985 : 229-231
17. Sontheimer 198 : 15

18. cp. Ruping 1977 : 81-98
19. Burghart 1983 : 639
20. Sonthimer 1982 : 334
21. Dumont Louis 1970 a : 12
22. ibid. 1970 b : 56
23. ibid. 1970b : 59
24. Barz 1976 : 32-36
25. Swāmī Tapayananda 1990 : 31
26. Chari S. M. 2000 : 31
27. ibid. 32
28. Venkatachari K.K.A. 1988 : 145
29. Chari op. cit
30. Flood 1998 : 146
31. तत्त्वार्थदीप पृ. 65

