CHAPTER III

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

(ONTOLOGY)
Prolegomena

A corollary of the problem of the nature of the Ultimate Reality, is the problem of the nature of God. The main issue with which we are confronted here is, is the God of religion identical with the Absolute of Philosophy? Or, in other words, does the Ultimate denote a personal being who thinks and loves, or is it an undifferentiated impersonal pure thought? Or, is the nature of Reality such that the concept of a personal and ethical God be justified? Another supplementary problem that comes up is the knowability, or otherwise, of God. In view of our avowed purpose we will confine our treatment of these problems to Rāmānuja, the Pāncarātra school and the Ālvārs. Since the philosophy of Rāmānuja is developed in direct opposition to, and by way of criticism of, the Advaitic view, and since the Pāncarātra thought, in many respects, is similar to the Advaitic view, we will take the latter also into consideration.

Brahman as the usual name for the Ultimate Reality

The Ultimate Reality in metaphysical categorisation, is named alike by Rāmānuja and the Advaitin as Brahman. Brahman is the centre round which the whole philosophy and theology of the Upaniṣads turn. Rāmānuja uses the words Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and sometimes Śrīnivāsa for the same highest Reality, but these words bear no sectarian tinge. They are in fact nothing but other names of Brahman. The Ultimate Reality in the Pāncarātra school is also usually named as Brahman or Para Brhma. The Ālvārs, however, name it as Viṣṇu, or with other names
denoting His various incarnations.

**Knowledge of Brahman not obtained through empirical reasoning**

With regard to the knowledge of Brahman as the Ultimate Reality there is a unanimous opinion that it is beyond human understanding. The scepticism with regard to the capacity of human understanding to grasp the nature of the Infinite is noticed in the Upaniṣads.²

**Advaitin's view**

The Advaitin denies all the possibilities of our having any logical knowledge of Brahman. The moment we attempt to think of Brahman, it is brought down to the position of finite. It can intuitively be known but that knowledge is nothing other than realising Brahmanhood, i.e. realising ourself as identical with Brahman.

**Rāmānuja's view**

Rāmānuja is also categorical in holding that neither perception nor inference nor any form of human experience can give us the knowledge of God. No amount of generalisation based on characteristics exhibited by the material world can suffice to prove His existence. He critically considers in detail, and refutes, the arguments which are put forth to establish, by empirical means, the existence of God.³

On the authority of the Śūtrakāra Rāmānuja contends that with regard to supersensuous matters, scripture is authoritative and reasoning is to be applied only to the support of the scripture.⁴ Scriptures declare that God is knowable through any means of proof, ⁵ but He is visible and manifest to the subtle seers ⁶ or to him whom God chooses⁷. In the Gītā we
learn that through the grace of God Arjuna was given a special eye whereby he was able to see the universal form of the Deity. Accordingly Ramanuja maintains that God can be known by bhakti or upasana, and through the grace of God. Regarding the place of scripture in this respect, Ramanuja maintains that it is only a means to the direct knowledge or intuition of Brahman.

Pancharatra view

The Pancharatra school, like the Advaita, regards the Ultimate Reality as unknown and unknowable. Brahman is regarded as having a transcendent nature which is beyond human understanding. At times in the manner of the Upanisads Brahman is defined as 'that who cannot be seen with the eye, touched with the sense of touch, smelt with the sense of smell, and who is beyond the ken of the sense of taste.' Though Brahman is thus, 'beyond the ken of eyes', it can be intuited directly like the fragrance of the flower. This intuitive knowledge, like that of the Advaita, is also nothing other than realising oneself as identical with Brahman.

Though the transcendent aspect of the Brahman is unknowable through empirical sense, the immanent aspect is not so. But it must be noted that this immanent aspect is not ultimately real. The Narayaniya declares that the Deity reveals Himself to His devotees. For instance the unmanifest Brahman becomes manifest for the sake of Narada and Uparicara, but He was not seen to the priest Bhraspati, who was indignant at seeing Him. He was told that only he can see God to whom He becomes gracious. Ekata, Dvita and Trita practised austerities for
four thousand years, but could not see Him and were told that He cannot be seen by one who is destitute of devotion.20

In this way the Pāñcarātra school believes that the unknown and incomprehensible becomes known and comprehensible, appears in human form and speaks through human lips solely out of urge of love and surge of grace. This is the wonder of wonders, the great mystery hidden from great thinkers, but revealed to great devotees like Nārada. It should however be noted that Śankara, the great Advaitin, also deals with the love of, and devotion to, the Deity. (Īśvara) 21

Ālvārs' view

For the Ālvārs the existence of God is a supreme fact. His existence should be experienced; it cannot be perceived or proved. The logical categories of empirical reason cannot apprehend Him. Therefore, Nāmāḻvār declares, 'It is impossible to declare that He has this or not that. He cannot be reached by any thought either on earth or in the heavens. 22 'It is impossible even for gods to know His real nature.... He is beyond the beyond. 23

Though God cannot be known through reason, and no one can behold Him with the eye, yet He can be apprehended by the devotees through their devotion resulting in the grace of God. Thus Nāmāḻvār declares that though He is unknown to others, 'Yet He is to me of a definite 'nature'.24 'He is very easily accessible to His devotees. His ways are very mysterious to others,' 25

From the foregoing it is obvious that the possibility of the empirical knowledge of the Ultimate Reality is denied by all these thinkers. The Advaita and the Pāñcarātra school advocate an intuitive knowledge of the Ultimate Reality which means being one with It. Rāmānuja and the Ālvārs however do not
favour this view. According to them one can know God through devotion and through the grace of God. This knowledge does not mean being one with God, though in some of the Alvars we do find a tendency towards absolute identity. In the Advaita and the Pāñcarātra school there is a place for devotion and love, but that is at the immanent or phenomenal level only.

Relation between Absolute of Philosophy and God of religion

The Advaita and the Pāñcarātra schools make a distinction between the Absolute of philosophy and God of religion, the indeterminate Brahman and the determinate Brahman, the intuitional Highest and the logical Highest, the metaphysically Real and the meditatively Ideal. This distinction is very sharp in the Advaita

Advaitins view

According to the Advaita school the Absolute of philosophy (ādīguna Brahman) is the only Reality, and God of religion (Saguna Īśvara) is the Absolute cast in the moulds of logic. The God of religion is nothing but a projection of, or concession to, the ignorant and empirical mind, and hence, not real. This distinction, it should be made clear, is conceptual only, and does not mean that there are two Brahmanas, to wit, Saguna and Nirguna. The one and the same Brahman appears differently at two different levels of reality.

Pāñcarātra view

Like the Advaita, the Pāñcarātra school also draws a distinction between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of Reality, but no fixed boundary is drawn between the two. Unlike Advaita, it is not at all clear about the ontological status of the personal or immanent aspect of Reality. The only
Supreme Being the Pāñcarātra thinkers knew about was the Transcendent One. But, somehow, they could not rest satisfied with this aspect and soon recognised that aspect also with which It stands related, though not directly, to the universe. Of these two aspects the transcendent one is undoubtedly real, but it is not clear as to whether both of them are equally real, or the former alone is real. Nor is it clear whether the personal God has a being for Himself and an appearance for others. In the Nārāyaniya, as we have said, we come across a passage wherein it is stated that the later personal appearance of Brahman is due to māyā and should not be regarded as real. In the Sāmhitās we do not find any such clear statement. Yet on the basis of the general drift of the school, which is manifestly advaitic, we may believe that the personal form is regarded as real from the meditational standpoint only.

Rāmānuja's view

Rāmānuja does not see an eye to eye with this sort of distinction. For him the Absolute and God, the Nirguna Brahman and the Saguna Brahman, have no distinction, conceptual or metaphysical. Both stand for the same Reality. One and the same Reality is both immanent and transcendent, and both these aspects have the same ontological status.

Ālvārs' view

The Ālvārs share the same view. Though they declare that 'God has a form; and He has no form!', yet they are quite clear in saying that both the personal and the impersonal forms are of one and the same Deity. They have not said anything about the ontological status of the two, nor should we expect so from them, because they are essentially devotees and not philosophers. But from their writings this much we can make out
that for them both the forms are equally real.

The Advaitic concept of Brahman as attributeless pure consciousness

The most distinguishing feature of the Advaita school is the advocacy of the doctrine of Nirviśeṣa or Nirgūṇa Brahman. The Ultimate Reality is one only without a second, pure, undifferentiated consciousness. As Thibaut has put it, 'whatever is, is in reality one; there truly exists only one universal being called Brahman or Paramātman, the highest self. This being is of an absolute homogeneous nature; it is pure 'Being', or, which comes to the same, pure intelligence or thought (caitanya, jñāna). Intelligence or thought is not to be predicated of Brahman as its attribute, but constitutes its substance; Brahman is not a thinking being, but thought itself. It is absolutely destitute of qualities; whatever qualities or attributes are conceivable, can only be denied of it. ..Brahman. ..is associated with a certain power called Maya or avidyā to which the appearance of this entire world is due'.

Rāmānuja in his mahāpūrvapakṣa summarises the advaitic position thus, 'Brahman as pure intelligence, entirely divested of any kind of forms, is the Ultimate Reality and all differences of the knower, the known, and the diverse forms of knowledge are all fictitiously superimposed on It owing to a certain defect.'

Rāmānuja's polemic against this Advaitic concept

The concept of God advocated by Rāmānuja, which he derived from Bodhayana and other Vedāntic teachers, is in direct opposition to the above Advaitic view. Therefore before he could develop and systematise the views set forth by Bodhayana etc., he had to refute the Advaitic view, and to prove that the scriptures admitted a very different interpretation.
The polemic against the Advaitic concept of 'Being' as a homogeneity of consciousness, exclusive of determinations, is divided by Râmânuja into two parts. Firstly, he tries to prove that Reality is not undifferentiated. Secondly, he tries to prove that it is also not pure consciousness.

**Reality is not undifferentiated**

In maintaining that the Reality cannot be undifferentiated, Râmânuja argues that those who assert the Reality can be undifferentiated, have really no means to prove so, for all proofs are based on the assumption of some qualified character. He offers the following arguments in the support of his contention.

(i) No proof in experience:- There is no proof of undifferentiated substance in our experience (or consciousness). Even if some one tries to prove that one's own experience, which is really qualified in nature, is unqualified, he will have to pick up some special trait in it, in virtue of which he will maintain that it is unqualified; but by that very fact his attempt will be defeated, for that special trait will make it qualified. Further, the Advaitin himself admits that 'to consciousness there actually belong different attributes such as permanency (oneness, self-liminousness etc.), and in general'. Lastly, the very attempt of the advaitin to prove differences between his view and other views, implies that the Reality is affected with difference.

(ii) Nor in Sabda:—There is no proof of undifferentiated substance in speech (sabda). Speech operates with words and sentences. The plurality of words is based on plurality of meanings. The sentence, therefore, which is an aggregate of words, expresses some special meanings of words, and hence has no power to denote a thing devoid of all difference.
(iii) Nor in perception:-Perception also does not prove so. As regards the determinate perception it is well established that it manifests an entity with its characters; but even indeterminate perception manifests some character, for its indeterminateness means only the exclusion of some particular character. All apprehension of consciousness takes place by means of some distinction like 'this is such and such'. The first apprehension of object (prathama pīṇḍa grahaṇa) is not devoid of difference, but in it only some specific characters are discerned. Then it is perceived again the characters discerned before are revived in the mind, and by comparison the specific characters are properly assimilated. This is what we call determinate perception. 33

(iv) Nor in inference:-Inference also being based on perception, cannot reveal a thing undifferentiated. It may be argued that even in opposition to perception, inference may establish that all differences are unreal. This is not possible, says, Rāmānuja, for to do so inference will have to establish that Reality is different from what it is revealed to be in perception, and in this very fact it will be admitting the reality of differences. Further, it is impossible to say that, though perception reveals differences as real, inference may come to a contrary conclusion; for to do so inference will have to contradict itself. It will have to establish that differences are unreal on the ground that they are real (i.e., on the ground of perception on which inference ultimately rests). Rāmānuja thus concludes that 'a person who maintains the existence of a thing devoid of difference, on the ground of differences affecting that very thing, simply contradicts himself without knowing what he does.' 34
(v) Nor in the nature of knowledge: Rāmānuja further argues that all knowledge is differentiated. Every thought is an affirmation of Reality and not mere apprehension of identity devoid of differentiation. The very nature of thought as a synthetic activity propounds at once its relational character.

(vi) Nor in Śruti: Scriptures do not teach that Brahman is devoid of all differentiations. Rāmānuja criticises the advaitin for bifurcating scriptural texts as Nirguna Śruti and Saguna Śruti. He insists that all texts are equally important and they should be interpreted in a synthetic manner. Accordingly the passage 'Being only was there in the beginning...' does not mean that Brahman is a pure unity devoid of all differences, otherwise how can attributes like eternity be predicated to Him. What it really means is that He is one like whom there is none other, and that He is the Alpha and the Omega of the universe. Similarly the passage of Mundaka (1.1.5) which denies qualities to Brahman, negates only the undesirable qualities and not all the qualities.

In the same way Rāmānuja at many places interprets a host of texts and concludes that what the scriptures teach is that Brahman has many excellent qualities, and is not undifferentiated.

(vii) Nor in Śruti and Purāṇa: Rāmānuja lastly derives support from the Śrūtis and purāṇas, which, he says, also teach that Brahman is 'essentially free from all imperfections whatsoever and comprises within Himself all auspicious qualities.' From all this Rāmānuja concludes that there is no proof anywhere of a substance devoid of all differences. Or, stated positively the only Real revealed by the means of knowledge is one characterised by differences. This conclusion is so important for Rāmānuja that he erects his entire philosophy on its
Reality not pure consciousness

Rāmānuja now proceeds to refute the second part of the Advaitic thesis, viz., the Ultimate Reality, which is pure undifferentiated Being, is identical with pure consciousness. He argues that since everything experienced is found to display differences within itself, and since all proof rests on experience, the advaitin cannot prove his undifferentiated pure consciousness to be real. 'Consciousness is either proved or not. If it is proved, it follows that it possesses attributes; if it is not, it is something absolutely nugatory, like a skyflower, and similar purely imaginary things.'

Rāmānuja further argues that the advaitin himself predicates certain attributes such as eternity, oneness and self-luminousness to Brahman, so that even on his hypothesis Brahman is not pure attributeless consciousness. Nor can he urge that against this "all these attributes in reality mere consciousness, for they are essentially distinct. Even if it is said that these qualities are not positive attributes existing within the nature of consciousness, but merely indicate absence in consciousness of qualities opposed to them, and hence are to be described as negative attributes; still this admission cannot be avoided that they are attributes of consciousness. That they do qualify the nature of consciousness, and hence are attributes, is proved by that fact that otherwise it would be possible to ascribe non-eternity, non-oneness and the like to consciousness.'

Reality cannot be impersonal

Thus controverting the advaitin's thesis of regarding Brahman as attributeless pure consciousness, Rāmānuja now attempts to prove that Brahman must be regarded as a self or person.
The advaitin has equated consciousness with Brahman. But Rāmānuja argues that consciousness, regarded as a proof in itself by the advaitin, must be a proof of something to some one; that is, it inevitably pre-supposes a self on the one hand and objects on the other. And if it thus presupposes a self to which it belongs, it is clear that it is this self which is the agent in consciousness and not consciousness itself. That is why we say 'I experience' (anubhāv āmyaham) and not 'I am experience' (anubhyaham). The essential character of consciousness is that by its very existence it renders things capable of being objects, to its own substrate, of thought and speech. That such is the essential nature of consciousness the advaitin himself admits, for he proves thereby the self-luminosity of the consciousness which thus clearly presents itself as the attribute of an agent.

That consciousness is an activity of the self is further established from the fact that it consists of momentary mental states which require a permanent self as their substrate and relating principle. From the fact of recognition we further clearly see that this agent is permanent while its attribute, i.e., consciousness, changes.

Moreover, the grammarians tell us that words such as consciousness are relative, we cannot use the expression 'He knows' without reference to an object known and the subject who knows. 40

From the foregoing examination and refutation of the fundamental advaitic position Rāmānuja concludes that Brahman, the highest Reality, is not a pure substance destitute of all qualities, or a consciousness void of attributes. His analysis of the nature of consciousness further led him to the conclusion that consciousness presupposes a conscious self and is different
from it. Brahman, to whom consciousness is predicated, cannot be mere non-differentiated consciousness, but must be a Self characterised by consciousness.

Rāmānuja's conception of Brahman as the highest Self characterised by innumerable excellent attributes

So far we have followed Rāmānuja in establishing as against the advaitin that Brahman is the highest person, and not pure undifferentiated consciousness. We shall now see how in order to accentuate his opposition to the advaitin's theory Rāmānuja describes Brahman as the highest Person, characterised by an infinite number of excellent qualities, and how he delights in piling adjectives on adjectives describing the divine attributes. He defines Brahman as 'that highest Person who is the ruler of all, whose nature is antagonistic to all evil, whose purposes come true, who possesses infinite auspicious qualities such as knowledge, blessedness and so on; who is omniscient, omnipotent, supremely merciful, from whom creation, subsistence and reabsorption of this world proceed.' Or, 'The sole cause of the evolution, maintenance, dissolution and release from Samsāra, of the world of sentient and non-sentient entities, of a nature different from all things other than Himself, on account of being opposed to all evil, and being one with infinite auspiciousness, of hosts of lovely qualities, boundless and unsurpassable, who is known in the entire Veda under the various designations of soul of all, the Supreme Brahman, Supreme Glory, Supreme Principle, Supreme Spirit, Real Being etc., all of which denote the Venerable Lord Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme person. The śrūtis are meant to set forth His manifestation, so they expound the universal dominion of the Supreme Spirit as the inner Soul of the totality of Spiritual and non-spiritual
entities by expressions like His Power, His hands, His Portion, His manifestation, His form, His body, His shape, etc. by sāmānādhikaranya constructions. Notable in this connection is the introduction of Rāmānuja to the Gītā Bhāṣya. All his works abound with such descriptions.

According to Rāmānuja Brahman is metaphysically the ground of all existences, religiously their final refuge, morally their inner controller and aesthetically the beauty and bliss inhering in them. He is the 'Hole' of metaphysics, the 'Holy' of religion, and the 'Abode' of all ethical and aesthetic values. That he is 'All' is described variously by Rāmānuja in the Gītā Bhāṣya as follows, 'He is the End to be attained, the Supporter, the Ruler, the immediate Witness, the Abode, the spiritual Resort, the well-wishing Friend. He is the place of origination and annihilation of whatever and whenever. He is all that can be begotten and destroyed. He is the imperishable Cause of all that'.

Various attributes of Brahman

Time and again Rāmānuja emphatically writes that Brahman is a treasury of numberless qualities such as brilliance, beauty, comeliness, youthfulness, compassion, generosity, goodness, love etc. which are in accordance with His pleasure and will, and which are unimaginable, miraculous, impeccable and incomparable. The traditional attributes like satyam, jñānam, anantam, anandam, vīryam, are also dealt with. Along with these, on the authority of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, he mentions six other attributes of Brahman viz., jñāna, bala, aisvērya, vīrya, śekti and tejas—which are characteristically ascribed to Lord Viṣṇu in the Pāñcarātra school. Rāmānuja simply enumerates these attributes and does not explain their meaning and mutual relation. Though these attributes are essentially Pāñcarātric, they are imbibed by the Viṣṇu
Ramanuja dwells lovingly on the two attributes of Brahman as the Redeemer. They are saulabhya (easy accessibility) and suaśilya (graciousness). The Redeemer is so condescending to His beloved devotee that He says in the Gītā, 'I reckon that when to a loving devotee...I deliver my own self entirely, even that is no sufficient compensation for the love has borne for me. I reckon, too, that even when I have given my own self to him I have done little or nothing for him.' Elsewhere He declares that 'As for the ājnāni I deem him as my very self.'

Besides ascribing numerous attributes to the Lord, Ramanuja is quite emphatic in maintaining that He is devoid of all evil qualities. In the Upaniṣads not only innumerable metaphysical, moral and religious attributes are ascribed to the Supreme Being, but He is also proclaimed to be free from evil.

Ramanuja frequently uses the words 'niravadya,' 'nirvikāra' and the like to denote God's absolute freedom from all imperfection. Another equivalent expression more frequently used by him is 'svamastha heya guṇa pratyanīka.' That God is full of all imaginable auspicious attributes and devoid of all evil is derived by Ramanuja from the positive and negative passages of the Upaniṣads.

This ascription of a plurality of attributes to Brahman does not make Him plural. All these attributes are co-ordinative and not contradictory. While each attribute by itself is different from the other, all the attributes belong to one single substratum, and do not divide its integrity. That is to say, they are different facets of the same Reality. Ramanuja explains this by the law of coordination.
Form and body of Brahman

Unlike the advaitin, Rāmānuja pays stress upon the concrete nature of Brahman, implying a synthesis of attributes, which lends to Him a character and a personality. The Advaitin denies character and personality to Brahman, who is for him mere identity. There is no inwardness or outwardness in Brahman, since He is stillness and sameness everywhere. Rāmānuja disagrees with the advaitin on this point. To him Brahman is both a principle and a person. He has a personality of His own. He alone is a perfect personality. He possesses an infinite number of exalted auspicious attributes and analogously a divine form of supreme excellence, suitable to His nature, peculiar to Himself, not made of the stuff of Prakṛti, nor due to Karma. His form is altogether different from all entities other than Himself.

Rāmānuja writes that just as on the authority of the scripture he has maintained that Brahman has excellent attributes, similarly on the same authority he holds that God has a form. The scripture denies only the Prakṛta attributes and form, but proclaims that He has aprakṛta attributes and form. He writes that the Sūtrakāra has also declared that Brahman has a form. Further he quotes Tanka and Droniṣṭa who hold that God possesses a supra-sensible body, not made of māyā or prakṛti, and that it is not artificial. It should be made clear here that for whatever attributes he enumerates and for whatever description of divine form and weapons he gives, he intensively quotes from the Ṛgveda, Samhitās, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, Rāmāyana and Viṣṇu Purāṇa and therefore all this is purely Vedic only and should not be traced to non-Vedic sources.

Regarding the form of Brahman he writes, 'The Highest Brahman possesses an infinite number of qualities of unimaginable
excellence, and analogously a divine form suitable to His nature and intentions, i.e., adorned with infinite supremely excellent and wonderful qualities, splendour, beauty, fragrance, tenderness, loveliness, youthfulness, and so on. And in order to gratify His devotees He individualises that form so as to render it suitable to their apprehension. In the Vedārtha Samgraha he writes, 'There are thousands of śrutis that declare that this Supreme Brahman Nārāyaṇa has a proper form of undefinable knowledge and beatitudes/the purest state.....He possess an invariable divine form that is in accordance with His pleasure and in harmony with Himself....' In a similar language elsewhere he writes, 'He who is always gloriously visible, is the pre-eminent person who dwells within the orb of the sun. His splendour is like that of a colossal mountain of molten gold and His brilliance that of the rays of hundreds of thousands of suns. His long eyes are spotless like the petals of a lotus which, sprouting forth from deep water on a soft stalk, blossoms in the rays of the sun. His eyes and His forehead and His nose are beautiful, His coral like lips smile graciously, and His soft cheeks are beaming. His neck is as delicately shaped as a conch-shell and his bud-like divine ears, beautifully formed, hang down on His stalwart shoulders. His arms are thick, round and long, and He is adorned with fingers that are redeemed by nails of a most becoming reddish tinge. His body, with its slender waist and broad chest, is well-proportioned in all parts, and His shape is of an unutterably divine form. His colour is pleasing. His feet are as beautiful as budding lotuses. He wears yellow robe that suits Him and He is adorned with immeasurable, marvelous, endless and divine ornaments—-a spotless diadem, earrings, necklaces, the Kaustubha gem, bracelets, anklets,
belt etc. and with conch, Disc, Club, Sword, the Bow Sāranga, the Cūṇḍa Śrīvatsa and the Garland Vanamāla. He attracts eye and thought alike of all by the measureless and boundless beauty that is His. He overflows the entire creation of animate and inanimate beings with the nectar of His comeliness. His youth is exceedingly wonderful, unimaginable and eternal. He is as delicately tender as blossoming flowers. He perfumes the infinite space between the cardinal points with the odour of holiness. His profound majesty is for ever encompassing the entire universe. He locks upon the hosts of His devotees with loving eyes, filled with compassion and affection....

In the metaphysics of Rāmānuja we have another description of the body of Brahman, which is quite irreconcilable with this crude anthropomorphic description. He defines body as, 'Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purposes, and which stands to the soul in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that soul.' Then he writes, 'In this sense then, all sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute the body of the Supreme person, for they are completely controlled and supported by Him for His own ends, and are absolutely subordinate to Him.'

This concept of 'world-body' of Brahman logically follows from the organicistic ontological position of Rāmānuja, which we have discussed before. It is named by Rāmānuja as 'Sarīra Sarīrī bhāva'. This concept is fully in the fitness of his metaphysics and a 'raison de'être of his philosophy. Rāmānuja has borrowed it from the Antaryāmī Brāhmaṇa of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad which says, 'He who dwells in the self and within the self, whom the self does not know, of whom the self is the body, who rules the self within, He is thyself, the Ruler
The abode, Consorts and entourages of Brahman

Along with the form of Brahman Rāmānuja dwells upon the abode of Brahman. He writes that God has a divine residence, the proper form and nature of which are beyond the ken of thought and the power of expression. This divine residence is not made of the stuff of Prakṛti. But this does not mean that Rāmānuja has advocated the idea that the divine residence is made of Śāṅcāra Sattva, a peculiar spiritual matter, as some writers have misrepresented him.

Rāmānuja further writes that Brahman has an infinite entourage of attendants and necessaries, suitable to Him. There is a class of beings perfect in knowledge, eternally free, who serve Him.

Brahman is further said to have a consort Śrī, who suits His pleasure and who is in harmony with Him possessing an immeasurable eminence of proper form, qualities, supernal power, ascendancy and character; and who is held dear by the Lord because of her boundless, perfect and numberless beautiful virtues such as faithfulness and the like.

In this way Rāmānuja describes the form, attributes, ornaments, weapons, abode, consort, entourages etc., of Brahman in a paurānic way, which absolutely falls apart from his metaphysical set up.

Incarnation of Brahman

Lastly, Rāmānuja deals with the incarnation of Brahman. Dr. Radhakrishnan remarks that Rāmānuja's God is not an impassive absolute who looks down upon us from the height of heaven, but joins us in the experiences of our life, shares our ends, and
The God of Rāmānuja is not like the Absolute of the advaitin rigid, motionless, totally lacking in initiative or influence, who cannot comfort in stress and suffering, when weak and erring human beings call from the depths, and who does not extend His helping hand but remains indifferent to the fear and love of His worshipper. He is a God of grace and favour, love and kindness, who is always at the disposal of His devotees, and who descends from the supernatural to the natural order in order to gratify His ardent devotees.

The idea of the descent of God in the form of incarnation is by no means alien to the character of Viṣṇu who from the Vedic times is recognised as the God of grace, favour and help. There are glimmerings of the doctrine of incarnation even in the earliest Vedic literature. The Yajurveda clearly declares that 'the One Unborn takes manifold births'. The unique contribution of the Gītā lies in clothing the Absolute of the monistic philosophers with flesh and blood, and in illustrating that the all-pervading unknowable Supreme indeed appears in a human form, speaks through human tongue and is concerned about human affairs. About the Gītā Prof. Kumarappaa has rightly remarked that the revolution in the thought of the Divine can hardly be more complete.

On the authority of the above Rāmānuja accepts and advocates the view that God incarnates Himself in the world. He writes that God in His infinite mercy 'assumed various forms without putting away His own essential God-like nature.'"
the different classes of beings, and thus is born in many ways.\textsuperscript{78} 'Never divesting myself of my essential attributes of suzerainty, that of being birthless, of being exhaustless, or being the Lord of all, etc., I go into birth...\textsuperscript{79} These incarnations of God are not special combinations of earth and the other elements.'\textsuperscript{80}

On the authority of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa Rāmānuja holds that along with Viṣṇu Īśvara Lakṣmi also descends on the earth. They are ontologically one, but appear as two.\textsuperscript{81}

The motive behind incarnation is to uphold righteousness\textsuperscript{82} and to be accessible to His devotees.\textsuperscript{83} In this way in Rāmānuja's view the Infinite crystalises as finite, the unborn becomes born, the Immortal works as mortal, all through the urge of love and surge of grace.

The nature of God in the Pāṇcarātra School

The history of Indian philosophy and religion witnesses the transformation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads into the religion of the Purāṇas. The Supreme Being, which was conceived of philosophically in the Upaniṣads, came to be thought of in religious terms in the Purāṇas. The same sort of transformation we witness in the Pāṇcarātra school as well. The description of the nature of God in His transcendental aspect, and the qualities predicated to Him here are essentially the same as those given in the Upaniṣads, a fact which suggests that here an intensely ardent religion seeks to find support in the speculations of the Upaniṣadic sages.

The Nārāyanīya account of the nature of God

In the description of the nature of God in Nārāyanīya we find a mingling of incongruous ideas. He is sometimes identified with the Upaniṣadic neuter Brahman and sometimes with the...
Supreme Puruṣa on the theistic pattern. This is, perhaps, because of the reason mentioned above.

The Nārāyanīya describes Brahman as unborn, eternal, everlasting, attributeless and partless. He is subtle, unknowable, unmanifest, immobile, static and beyond senses. He is all-pervading, witness, and the Inner Self of the whole world, yet He cannot be comprehended by any one at any time. The all-pervading nature of Brahman is described in such a way as to intend the idea that He is the only real, and all are but reflections of Him. Though He is bodiless, He is said to pervade all the bodies. Though originally unmanifest He is said to appear as manifest. This later appearance is said to be due to māyā. All this description is in consonance with the advaitic tendency of the school.

In the language of the Upaniṣads He is described as with attributes as well as without attributes. But more often He is referred to as 'nirguṇaḥ' and 'nirguṇatmakah'. He is described as above the three prākṛta guṇas. He is further regarded as inactive. Therefore He cannot be the direct creator of the world. Then God is described as the creator of the world. Then God is described as the Creator, we should, perhaps, take it as the personal God and not the impersonal one.

In the chapter 339 not less than two hundred predicates to the Deity are enumerated, and He is identified with the Absolute and with everything that symbolises greatness and perfection. This may either be an eulogistic attempt, or an indication that there is no ontological but only conceptual difference between the Deity and the Absolute. The Advaitin also maintains the same view.
Attributes of God

In the monistic fashion God is very often described in the Narayaniya as 'jnanam', 'only mind', 'Lord of speech', 'the embodiment of correctness of judgement', 'identifiable with the wisdom of the Sankhyayoga' etc. It is further said that when all things have perished knowledge remains as the sole companion of God.

The above, perhaps, is the description of the indeterminate Brahman. The perfection of the determinate Brahman is said to consist in love. The loving nature of the Deity, which results in His firendly helpfulness, infinite tenderness, and grace to the sinner even—a characteristic of Visnu even in the Vedantic times—also features prominently in the Narayaniya. It is described that by the grace of the King Vasu ascended to heaven and was rescued when cast down from there by a curse of the rishis. He is regarded as the Granter of every wish and His troops go everywhere for protecting His worshippers. He is kind to all His worshippers, fond of them and ever-affectionate towards them. He is the greatest friend and the sole refuge of all men. He dispels the fears of all persons and from Him springs the attribute of consciousness.

Besides knowledge and love, the Deity is said to be an 'incarnate-righteousness'. He is regarded as perfect in all earthly morality, unpolluted by good and bad actions, and free from all attachments. He establishes law and Himself abides by it, to set the standard for men. He never utters anything base or obscene or false. He always hears that which is pure and holy and never that which is sinful. Even the very names of the Deity have a sanctifying and cleansing power.

Form of God

The Supreme Brahman is formless but the Deity, His
determinate aspect, is said to possess a bewitchingly beautiful form, full of effulgence and glory. He is described as 'an illustrious Deity of a thousand rays.' His beauty is said to be indescribable and is suggested only by means of inadequate analogies.

Abode of God

The Nārāyaṇīya does not contain a clear account of the abode of God. At one place Badrikāśrama is described as the abode of God Nārāyaṇa, but there God is Himself said to be worshipping His 'mūlamprakṛtim' (original prakṛti) which is said to reside in the Śvetadvīpa situated in the Milky Ocean. Sometimes Nārāyaṇa is described as residing in the centre of Sun in whose rays reside innumerable sages and deities. It seems that the Lord Nārāyaṇa stands here for the personal God.

Manifestations of God

The Nārāyaṇīya, unlike the later five-fold manifestations of the Samhitās, mentions three-fold successive manifestations of God. The Supreme Being is absolutely transcendent to whom perhaps the phrase 'Mūlam Prakṛtim' is applied. His first immanent manifestation is Vāsudeva or Nārāyaṇa, the highest personal God. The second manifestation is the three Vyūhas. The third and the last manifestation is the vibhavas or avatāras.

Vyūha manifestation of God

The doctrine of Vyūha, which we find fully elaborated in the Samhitās, is found in a germ form in the Nārāyaṇīya. Here we find varied accounts of this doctrine. It forms a part of the cosmic process of creation. The universe is supposed to evolve in two parallel and graduated orders, viz., a physical order of material causation on the Sāṃkhya pattern, and a spiri-
In this spiritual order of conditioned existences, which is named as Vyūha.

Supreme Being appears first as Vaśudeva and then in combination with the primeval matter (cf. Mahat of Sāṃkhya) appears as Īśna, called Saṃkarṣaṇa. By Saṃkarṣaṇa's spontaneous act there evolves from him Pradyumna, as mind of all creatures (cf. Buddhi of Sāṃkhya). From Pradyumna arises Aniruddha, as consciousness of all creatures (cf. Ātmākaṇḍa of Sāṃkhya). The Deity then becomes four-fold (Caturmūrtīdhara).

Avatāra manifestation of God

The Nārāyaṇiya further mentions the theory of avatāras, whose description is more or less Pauṇḍarīcic, only with this difference that whereas in the Purānas the Supreme Being Himself takes incarnation and descends, in the Nārāyaṇiya the incarnations do not proceed from the Supreme Being directly but only from the Vyūhas. The motive behind the incarnation is said to be the good of creatures, restoration of righteousness, and destruction of the evil elements.

The Śaṁhitā account of the nature of God

The Ultimate Reality in the Pāńcarātra Śaṁhitās in its transcendent aspect is named as Parame Śrīnāma (or Parame Śrīnāma), a term which recalls the Nīruṇa Upanisadtic Śrīnāma. Śrīnāma is described as originally Unmanifest and Impersonal, but assuming personal form. In its original nature It is beginningless and endless, eternal and immutable, and cannot be designated either as existent or non-existent. It is timeless, nameless, beyond past, present and future. It is neither before nor behind, neither below nor above, neither short nor long, neither gross nor atomic. It is beyond all
At cannot be given any simile, and can only be referred to as 'is'. It is all-tranquil, unchanging, unpolluted, eternal, static, non-active and unruffled like a waveless sea. It is self-existent and the support of all other things.

Its essence is pure consciousness and pure bliss. It is devoid of all that is evil and the abode of all that is good and blissful. It is beyond all Prâkrtã guṇas and yet is hidden by guṇas (guṇaguhya).

It is the Supreme existence that pervades all things and resides everywhere and in all things.

All this description of the nature of the Ultimate Reality is purely Upanishadic, Advaitic and monistic in character. There can be no doubt about the thorough-going Advaitic character of these utterances of the Samhitãs. The unmistakable influence of the Advaita on the Samhitãs can further be made clear by a detailed analysis of each of the prominent Samhitãs.

The Padma Samhitã describes Brahman as follows,

'Brahman is characterised by bliss, He is the beginningless, changeless, always undifferentiated, self-knowing, faultless, superlatively subtle, self-determined, the ruler, self-luminous, spotless, infinite, undestructible, tranquil, invisible, omniscient, omnipotent, the source of consciousness of bliss (cidananda), the essence of consciousness (cidrûpa), omnipresent, Supreme, devoid of past and future, the Lord called Vâsudeva, the source of all beings, Íśvara, the Supreme Puruṣa, of a stainless nature, eternal, without waves, without disturbance, boundless, beyond the guṇas, with guṇas, the giver of all desires.'

The last line and a few subsequent lines are very much similar to the description of the Brahman in the Gita XIII. It is noteworthy that the word Saccidananda so
frequently used in the Advaita, as the description of Brahman, occurs here. 118

The Advaitic nature of the Pāṇcarātra philosophy is further confirmed by the Lakṣmi Tantra which describes Brahmājas as follows; 'It is characterised by the absence of pain. It is the eternal by whom all this moving and motionless is embraced.....

All this world is enveloped by Its ahamta (egoity). It is everywhere, tranquil, changeless, eternal, infinite, devoid of limitations of space, time etc. It is called Mahāvibhūti, because it extends infinitely. It is Brahmā, the supreme abode, the light without substratum, of six qualities, similar to the ocean of immortality, waveless, shining. It is One, undifferentiated consciousness, tranquil, free from rising and setting. It is called Brahmā, the secondless, being possessed of Śakti which is not different from It.' 119

The Jayākhya Samhitā is equally manifest in its Advaitic tendency. It describes Brahman as supreme existence which is all-pervasive. All things are but reflection of It, and It is the essence of all. 120 The Jayākhya Samhitā writes, 'Just as in a clean mirror whatever things are seen do not belong to the mirror, similarly, the material world which is reflected in the Brahman does not belong to It. In this world of deception Brahman pervades everything and yet is not attached to anything just like a drop of water on the leaf of a lotus.' 121 'Its movement and fixity are like the empty space of a pot, which when carried appears to carry the space along with it, but in reality the space does not move anywhere with the movement of the pot. Similar is the case with Brahman.' 122

The illustrations of mirror and space are the stock examples of the Advaita school and are borrowed here. This is
a clear instance of the Advaitic nature of the Pāñcarātra philosophy. The world is recognised here as a reflection, which is unreal or as a conditioned aspect of Brahman. Here we find the elements of both the Advaitic theories of bimāpratibimbavāda and avacchedavāda in an implicit form.

The Parama Samhitā is also equally clear on the Advaitic character of the Pāñcarātra philosophy. It writes, 'The self-same glorious bright One, the Supreme, the Highest Soul, manifests itself in different forms, in various classes of beings. The manner in which a crystal bead, by the proximity of things of different colours, is seen in different colours, in the same way the Supreme Puruṣa, though one Himself, assumes in this world different forms according to the ingredient qualities, and thus becomes the bound ones and the released.' This passage is notable for its declaration that the One and the Only Reality appears manifold. This appearance is compared to the unreal varied appearances of the crystal bead. Lastly, it declares that the finite spirits, bound or released, are none else but Brahman.

The Ahirbudhāṇya Samhitā also describes the Ultimate Reality in an Advaitic manner. The Ultimate Reality is beginningless, endless, devoid of all names and forms, beyond all speech and mind, the omnipotent whole, which is absolutely changeless. It is like the waveless sea. It is absolutely self-realised and complete in itself, and cannot be defined by any expressions such as 'this' or 'such'.

Even the Nāradā Pāñcarātra, which is much more theistic than any other mentioned Samhitās, and which has very much come under the influence of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, could not shirk off the Advaitic elements. It not only describes Brahman as
attributeless, desireless and unattached,\textsuperscript{125} or as One without a second,\textsuperscript{126} or as the only all-pervading Reality,\textsuperscript{127} but it also declares that Brahman alone is true, and the whole world Brahmā downwards is false. (mithyā)

The Viṣṇu Samhitā is equally emphatic, declaring that the manifoldness is false. It gives the illustrations of mirrors and images, moon and its many reflections in water, and declares that only the ignorant perceives plurality. For a true seer the reality is one.\textsuperscript{128} The same negation of duality is found in a more emphatic way in the Brahma Samhitā.\textsuperscript{130}

All the foregoing accounts leave us in no doubt about the predominantly Advaitic nature of the Pāncarātra philosophy.

**Immanent aspect of God.**

The immanent aspect of God is inseparably bound up with the story of creation, and can, therefore, hardly be treated more conveniently than taking the latter throughout as our starting point. Yet for the sake of classified treatment we shall abstract the account of the immanent aspect of God from its cosmogonical context.

**Lakṣmī as associated with God**

The Supreme Being who is described as purely transcendental or 'wholly other', is, in His immanent aspect, somehow, associated with a creative power (Sakti), a dynamic principle, which is spoken of figuratively as His consort Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī is here not merely a consort of the Lord, but a philosophical principle, a metaphysical complement of the Lord, His creative potency. In the Samhitās the Supreme Being is not at all concerned with the creation etc. of the world. Lakṣmī practically usurps the place of the Supreme Being in this respect. In her two aspe-
öts which are named as Bhūti and Kriyā she is the material as well as the instrumental cause of the world.

With the association of Lakṣmi (who is said to be lying dormant in Him before the start of creation) the Supreme Being passes from His undifferentiated and transcendent form to a personal form characterised by six guṇas, viz., jñāna, aśvayā, śakti, bala, virya and tejas.131 These guṇas-aprakṛta in nature— in their totality make up the body of the Lakṣmi and also of the immanent aspect of God, named as 'Para', or sometimes as Vāsudeva who is referred to as 'Sādgūnyavigraham devam',132 and who is the highest personal God. It should be noted here that these guṇas are not associated with, and hence do not in any way affect the 'Being' or the essence of the transcendent Supreme Being, because they are merely concerned with His 'becoming' or manifestation. The transcendent Brahman and the immanent Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is associated with Lakṣmi, are regarded as distinct in the Lakṣmi Tantra.133

Is Lakṣmi postulated?

For the Pāñcarātra thinkers the only Ultimate Reality is the one, static, unchanging transcendent Brahman. But then the problem arose as to how to account for the changing world. How the infinite and perfect Brahman appears as the finite and imperfect world? This was the problem before Śankara as well. Śankara ushered in the concept of māyā to relate the static Brahman with the changing world. The Pāñcarātra thinkers also introduced the principle of Śakti manifestly with the same purpose. Both these principles are meant to supply the missing link between the transcendent Brahman and the immanent world.

Nature of Lakṣmi

It is interesting to note here that like the māyā
of the Advaita, Šakti is also regarded as neither positive nor negative. It can neither be affirmed nor negated. It is neither sāntā (unmanifest) nor uditā (manifest) nor maḍyamā (middle position of the two). The Pāñcarātra thinkers, perhaps, could not explain such a queer position. But perhaps what they meant was to say that it has subsistence (bhāva), but not existence (satā). The difference between the subsistent and an existent can be made clear from the following example. When I say, 'I am in the room', I exist, room exists, but does 'in' exist? And yet it has a meaning, a connotation. In the same way Lakṣmi subsists, but does not exist. Perhaps the Pāñcarātra thinkers must have been hinting at the same when they said 'Svarūpe naiva dṛṣyante dṛṣyante kāryataḥ tu sāḥ'.

In the Lakṣmi Tantra, Lakṣmi describes herself as follows, 'I am His Supreme Šakti, Abhantā, eternal, unchanging. My activity is of the nature of desire to create. I create of my own independent power by means of a myriad myriadth part of myself. I become two kinds of beings, the knower and the known, citsakti being the enlightener of both.'

Lakṣmi further describes herself as the creative aspect of the Lord. The Supreme Reality is static and hence non-active. Whenever Brahman is described as cause, it should be understood that Lakṣmi or Nārāyaṇa is meant there. It is the Šakti or Lakṣmi who acts in a manifold way for the welfare of the world in the forms of Śamkarsana etc.

Lakṣmi and Brahman are said to be one only. This is, perhaps, because the two differ in connotation, and not in denotation. The Ahirbudhnyā Saṁhitā says that they stand in relation of 'śakti' and 'śaktimat' and therefore one cannot be conceived without the other.

In the Lakṣmi Tantra the mutual relation of the two
is declared to be one of inseparable connection or inherence like that of an attribute and its bearer, subsistence and that which subsists, Iness and I etc. Their relation is regarded as identical because of their unbroken association and samavāya.¹⁴¹

Though this sort of distinction is maintained between Lakṣmī and the Lord, and they do not completely coalesce, yet this dualism is strictly speaking a makeshift for preserving the transcendental nature of Brahman.¹⁴²

Manifestations of God in His immanent aspect

The central dogma of the Pāñcarātra religion is that the Deity manifests Himself in a five-fold forms, viz., Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Antaryāmin and Arcā.¹⁴³ Schrader suggests that this dogma is an attempt to interpret philosophically the Pāñcarātra sattra of Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa spoken of in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa(III.6.1).¹⁴⁴ It, however, seems to be an attempt to bring the Supreme Transcendent one into loving and loving touch with the mundane world.

Para manifestation of God

The Para form is sometimes described as the first immanent manifestation of the Supreme Being. But sometimes it is said to have sprung from a still higher, the very first form of God.¹⁴⁵

This first form is referred to as 'the best of the Puruṣas' and 'the Highest Light', seen by the Brāhmaṇas in meditation.¹⁴⁶ This form is immanent only and should not be confused with the Supreme Transcendent One (perhaps this is the form which is in association with Lakṣmī and is named as Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇ or Vasudeva). This is clear when it is said that this form has originated from that which has all forms and no forms,'
God as Para is sometimes identified with and sometimes distinguished from Vyūha Vāsudeva. Then the two are distinguished the Vyūha Vāsudeva is said to have sprung from the Para Vāsudeva. The Pādmasastra describes the Para Vāsudeva as dividing himself 'for some reason' and becoming with one half the Vyūha Vāsudeva and with the other Nārāyaṇa, the creator of the primeval waters. The Para is adorned with nine chief ornaments and weapons which symbolically represent the principles of the universe.

Vyūha manifestation of God

The apparition of gunās in the Laksmi and Nārāyaṇa denotes the beginning of the process of Vyūha or emanation. Vāsudeva characterised by the six gunās, is sometimes called the first Vyūha. From Vāsudeva emanates Samkārgaṇa in whom jñāna and bala alone get manifested. From Samkārgaṇa comes Pradyūmaṇa to whom belong aisvarya and vīrya. Pradyumna emanates Aniruddha to whom sakti and tejas appertain. This, however, does not mean that each Vyūha has only two gunās, but each Vyūha is Vāsudeva himself with his six gunās, of which, however, only two in each case become manifest. In the Laksmi Tantra all these Vyūhas are said to proceed from Laksmi. The Vihagendra Samhitā, however, maintains that they come from Vāsudeva.

As we have seen, the Pāncarātra thinkers were very much particular in safeguarding and preserving the purity and unchanged nature of the transcendental Supreme Being. From that point of view, the chief merit, and hence its primary significance, is that it is such a process of emanation in which the Supreme remains unaffected and unchanged in all His five-fold manifestations.
Avatāra manifestation of God

Closely connected with the doctrine of Vyuḥas, is the next manifestation of God, named as vibhava (manifestation) of avatāra (descent). The only Supreme Being the Pāṇcarātra philosophers knew about was the Transcendent one, who was not in any way directly related to the world. Therefore, the Samhitās explicitly describe the avatāras either all springing from Aniruddha or some from Vāsudeva and the rest from the other three Vyuḥas. One should not be mistaken here in assuming that the Supreme Being Himself takes avatāra. This is a Paurāṇic conception. The Pāṇcarātra Samhitās nowhere maintain that the Supreme Being, laying aside His transcendent, static nature, assumes these finite forms. This is impermissible by the premises of the system. The Supreme Being is merely a spectator, with an attitude of passivity and indifference. He cherishes no regard and love for the mundane world, and it is beyond His nature to do so.

Antaryāmin manifestation of God

The fourth manifestation is the Antaryāmin avatāra, which is Aniruddha as the Inner Rule of all souls. It is a mysterious power seated in the 'lotus of the heart'. Here again it should be noted that this is not a manifestation of the Supreme Being but only of Aniruddha.

Arcā manifestation of God

The Pāṇcarātra Samhitās, unlike Nārāyaṇiya, finally recognise the arcā manifestation of God. An inanimate object (i.e. image of Viṣṇu), if duly consecrated according to the Pāṇcarātra rites, acquires a miraculous power and the Sakti of Viṣṇu descends in it. It is meant for the purpose of daily worship.
This arcā worship is different from the Pratika worship. In the latter the symbol is the locus, on which a devotee concentrates his thoughts. But no sooner the thought is centralised, the locus gets out of his vision and no necessity thereof is felt. But in the arcā worship, on the other hand, the devotee feels the very presence of God in it. And as such the inanimate image soon acquires a new meaning, becomes the object of love, of heart's hankering and of eyes' rest. This we find in the religion of the Ālvārs as well, who are the Tamil Vaiṣṇava saints.

The nature of God in the Ālvārs

The concept of God in the works of Ālvārs bears an explicit religious influence. The predominant thought of the Ālvārs regarding the nature of the Supreme Being is essentially religious. Though they tacitly recognised the existence of an main unknown, transcendent, all-pervading Absolute, yet their concern was only with that aspect of the Deity which is revealed in the world to the devotees. So much they busied themselves in dwelling upon the God of grace, love and benevolence that they even forgot the reality of the Transcendent One. The Deity they described is one who is endearing to His devotees and who takes personal interest in their welfare.

Regarding the nature of the Deity Nāmālvār declares in the Upaniṣadic fashion that 'He has a form; He has no form.' 'He has neither beginning nor end.' 'He is the highest goal of virtue and is higher than the Highest.' 'The Lord’s nature is very deep. It is very wide and very high, and it is very sweet and it is above material existence!' 'He is perfect goodness... His nature is to give wisdom and to be blissful.'
Attributes of God

Like the Pāñcarātra Sāṁhitās the Āḻvārs also attribute six gunas to the Lord. 'In Him wisdom, strength, power, Lordship, prowess and energetic splendour attain their perfection. He has innumerable good qualities.'

But more than all these personal qualities, what the Āḻvārs emphasise and appreciate is the loving and gracious nature of the Deity who showers His mercy and grace even to the most down-trodden and degraded. 'To be condescending is His nature,'

'My Lord is of such nature that any man of any knowledge can understand that my Lord is very condescending,' 'He is the Lord who does not cast out the undeserving nor does He take up only the deserving.' This thought that the Deity does not reject the undeserving fills the heart of the Āḻvārs with infinite joy and he cries out, 'My tongue sings to me divine songs. My body dances as if it is possessed by a Deity, worships the Lord, and reverts to Him. The angels and the gods discuss about His nature and reel as if their brains were deranged. He does not take a few deserving only. He does not leave the undeserving. He is not vexed with sinners nor does He love the good only. He is unseconded nectar to those who join and love Him.'

God in Arcā form

The Āḻvārs are particularly fascinated by the Lord's manifestation in arcā form. They are deeply touched by the Lord's infinite mercy in making Himself easily accessible to men in this form. They feel the Lord's immediate presence in the shrines and are moved to tears in the contemplation of His attributes. The Āḻvārs regard the shrine at 'Śrī Rangam' as the most important and worthy shrine of the Deity. Tondaradippodi, for example, exclaims 'Is not Rangam the glo-
They are the devoted bhaktas who dress and adorn the images, who love to dwell on the infinite perfections of God, the images represent, on the beautiful shapes He assumes, the radiance of His countenance, the brilliance of His ornaments, the splendour of His form.

The Áḻvārs are very much enchanted by the bewitching beauty of the Lord and express their rapturous passion and ardent longings. They also experience the reciprocation of love on the part of the Lord, who is described as being infatuated with the beauty and charms of the beloved, the Áḻvār. Nammāḻvār, for example, writes that God is constantly trying to woo His devotees to love Him.

Incarnations of God

The Áḻvārs dwell with love not only on the Deity as incarnate in images, but also as incarnate in individuals like Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. They deal with great devotion with the various stories connected with Viṣṇu and His avatāras and also with the great acts of helpfulness done by Him. We shall deal with this aspect of the Deity in the chapter on 'Means of emancipation'.

The Deity, thus, according to the Áḻvārs, is above all gracious, and though in His transcendent form He is beyond human conception, He has manifested Himself in incarnate form, e.g. as Rāma and more especially as the heart entrancing Kṛṣṇa. In times past, as Viṣṇu, He came in diverse finite forms to help those who cried to Him in trouble. In His infinite mercy He exists in images, delighting the hearts of men and receiving their worship. What He desires from His devotees is their whole-hearted devotion, expressing itself in loving worship at the
shrine, uttering His name, meditating on His acts of grace etc. He Himself aids them in this by His grace, however ignorant, morally depraved, down-trodden or unworthy they may be, and entering into their hearts He wipes out their sin and ignorance, and making them morally pure, He takes them to Himself.

The Álvars have not dealt with the abode, weapons, ornaments, spouses etc. of the Deity, because their main concern was with the all-absorbing devotion for the Deity. Among all the Álvars only Tirumālaṇi in the 'Tirucchandaviruttam' mentions the special Pāñcarātra doctrine of five-foldness of Divine manifestation in creation.

An appraisal of the Advaita philosophy and the philosophy of Rāmānuja

Having given an account of the concept of God according to the Advaita school, Rāmānuja, Pāñcarātra school, and the Álvars, we may now proceed to assess their comparative merits.

To start with the advaitin and Rāmānuja, both teach advaita, i.e., the view that there exists only one all-embracing Being. But while the advaitin's advaita is a rigorous and absolute one (kevalādvaita), the advaita of Rāmānuja is qualified (viśīṣṭādvaita). According to the advaitin whatever is, is Brahman. Brahman is absolutely homogeneous, so that all difference and plurality must be ultimately unreal. According to Rāmānuja also, whatever is, is Brahman, but Brahman is not of a homogeneous nature. On the contrary it contains within itself elements of plurality, owing to which it truly manifests itself in a diversified world. The Brahman of the advaitin is in itself impersonal, a homogeneous mass of pure consciousness, transcending all attributes; a personal God it becomes only through its asso-
ciation with the principle of māyā which is not real, so that, strictly speaking, advaitin's personal God is something which is not real. Rāmānuja's Brahman, on the other hand, is essentially a personal God, the omniscient and omnipotent Ruler of a real world. There is, thus, no room in his philosophy for the distinction between Para and Apara, Nirguna and Saguna, Indeterminate and Determinate, Intuitional Highest and Logical Highest etc.

Phenomenal character of Īśvara in the Advaita explained

The advaitin draws a distinction between transcendent Reality and empirical reality. He lays supreme emphasis on the transcendental aspect and throws away the empirical as philosophically unsubstantial, though it has a value for esoteric purposes. The transcendent one is the Absolute which is uncognisable. The moment we try to make this ultimate Subject an object of consciousness, we miss Its essential nature. Then no longer does It remain unconditioned, but becomes conditioned as it were. This we call Īśvara or God who is the conditioned aspect of the unconditioned Brahman which alone is real. God, thus, is the highest appearance that we have.170 Such a personal God has meaning only for the practical religious consciousness and not for the highest philosophical insight. The God of religion is less than the Absolute of philosophy, or is a concession to the empirical consciousness.

The Advaita system compared with Bradley

In this respect the position of the advaitin can be compared with that of Bradley when he writes, 'For me the Absolute is not God. God for me has no meaning outside the religious consciousness, and that essentially is practical. The Absolute for me cannot be God, because in the end the Absolute
is related to nothing, and there cannot be a practical relation between It and the finite will. When you begin to worship the Absolute, or the Universe, and make It the object of religion, you in that moment have transformed It. A personal God is not the ultimate truth about the universe. The Highest Reality; so far as I see, must be super-personal. If you identify the Absolute with God, that is not the God of religion. If you separate them, God becomes a finite factor in the whole. ... short of the Absolute, God cannot rest, and having reached that goal, He is lost and religion with Him. ... we may say that God is not God till He has become all in all, and that a God which is all in all is not the God of religion. God is but an aspect, and that must mean an appearance of the Absolute.

Like Bradley the advaitin points out a contradiction in religious consciousness. If we regard God's nature as perfect, it cannot be so, so long as man's imperfect nature stands over against it; if it is not perfect, then it is not the nature of God.

The advaitin denies self-revelation to Brahman. The Absolute is timeless and has in Itself no history or progress. Bradley also holds the same view. For him nothing perfect, nothing genuinely real can move. The Absolute has no seasons, but all at once bears Its leaves, fruits, and blossoms. The Advaitin feels that it is only the personal God who can reveal Himself. The demand for a God-head is a demand of practical reason, but the satisfaction of such a demand is a descent in mâyā. Accordingly all impulses and feelings of religion, however lofty and noble, are relegated to the lower plane of empirical consciousness, and have no place in the transcendental consciousness.
Sankara's concept of phenomenality of Isvara criticised

In spite of the marvellous subtlety, great speculative daring, austere intelligence and remorseless logic etc. of Sankara, the foremost Advaitin, it is not possible either for philosophy or religion to rest satisfied with the unpleasant position he has arrived at. He posits a God of religion who has no reality of His own, whose existence depends upon other entities (viz., Brahman and Maya), who has no ultimate existence, who in the end is to be merged in the Absolute, and whose omniscience is in a way an ignorance at a cosmic scale. It is a God of such a religion which is beset with inner contradictions and which is merely a false projection of the empirical mind. Sankara, as it has been said, gives us an Absolute, 'rigid and motionless' staring at us with frozen eyes regardless of our selfless devotion and silent suffering. It is like 'a bloodless Absolute dark with the excess of light' a blank which has every perfection except the one small defect of being dead.

Such is the last word of a philosophy which sets on to solve all contradictions. There surely cannot be this incurable contradiction between the higher religion and the higher philosophy. Both are but the theoretical and practical aspect of one and the same attempt at realising the highest end of life, and therefore the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion cannot be different. Our religious as well as intellectual needs must ultimately find their satisfaction at one and the same source. Religion cannot be content with worshipping a Supreme Being who is discovered not to be Supreme at all, but to be an appearance of a more ultimate Being. The truth of religion cannot be essentially different from the truth of philosophy. Truth is one and indivisible. Whatever is true in religion can-
not be false in philosophy and vice-versa. We cannot cut it into two, otherwise it would be like unto a house divided against itself, which cannot stand. As a matter of fact in their ultimate interpretation the two must converge into one.

The other difficulty with the advaita system, which is pointed out by Deussen, is 'How does Brahman become joined with avidyā?' In reality (paramārthataḥ) there is nothing else besides Brahman. If we imagine, we perceive a transformation (vikāra) of Him into the world, a division of Him into a plurality of individual souls, this depends on avidyā. But how does this happen? How do we manage to deceive ourselves into seeing transformation and a plurality, where in reality Brahman alone is?" 178

Lastly, we are faced with the problem of the ontological status of the God of religion. Does He really exist anywhere in the universe? If so, has He a being for Himself as well as an appearance for us? The advaitin holds that He is the Lord of mayā and is more real than any other finite being, yet He is regarded to be a product of mayā-product because it is conceived under the association of mayā-something unsubstantial which may at any moment be withdrawn into or lost in the Absolute. The advaitin points out the fundamental inconsistency of religion and of other forms of human consciousness, but in an effort to remove this inconsistency he leaves us with an unbridgeable chasm at the summit of things, and gives us in turn an empty, abstract and inscrutable Absolute which has no content continuous with anything we can identify in human experience, which has no history, no life, no movement, which has no quality that we can know except that of barren self-consistency.

Here an admirer of Sankara may say, 'Again to say
that Śāṅkara has no place for religious feeling is, to say the least, to make a mischievous statement. It is to miss the depth of his philosophical writings and to betray ignorance of his soul-inspiring hymns—a great and rich contribution to Sanskrit poetry—in which the words almost burst forth due to the pressure of intense emotional devotion with which they are packed.* 179

To this we reply that we are well aware of those sublime and lofty elements, but Śāṅkara gives us those richer and more positive results only when his insight breaks through the limits of his own logic. His thought is more satisfying when he surpasses the formal limitations of his monistic logic and follows the higher intuitions. Reality is too rich and complex to be imprisoned within the narrow walls of monistic logic, and consequently the solution that he offers on its basis is too concise and meagre to do justice to all the facts.

No sanction for the Śāṅkaraite contention in the Brahma-sūtra

It will not be irrelevant to end this review of the advaitic concept of Brahman with a consideration of whether Bādarāyana's Brahma-sūtras afford any evidence of this sort of two-fold division of Brahman into lower and higher. In the very first sūtra Bādarāyana declares that the task of the work is an enquiry into the nature of Brahman. The second sūtra defines that Brahman as that 'whence the origination and so on of this world proceed.' Śāṅkara in his Bhasya maintains that this definition pertains to lower Brahman only, who is associated with māyā. If Śāṅkara's interpretation were true, it is quite startling that at the very outset Bādarāyana should have given a definition of that Brahman which is not real and which is of a lower order only. If the object of the text is to know
the nature of Brahman, it is quite improbable that the Sutrakāra should start with a definition of lower Brahman only, whose knowledge accrues no permanent benefit. In the Upaniṣads also Brahman is sometimes described as personal and sometimes as impersonal, but it is nowhere said that thereon rests a distinction of two-fold Brahman.

Rāmānuja's concept of God stated and compared with that of Hegel

Let us now turn to Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja's Absolute has been called a concrete individual, an identity in-and-through difference, or an identity impregnated with differences. It is like the Absolute of Hegel and the personal God of Pringle-Pattison. Rāmānuja identifies God with the Absolute. God is a concrete whole of which matter and souls form the body. He is the concrete unity which consists of the inter-related and inter-dependent subordinate elements which are called 'vīšeṣāṇas'. God, the immanent controlling spirit is called 'vīšeṣya'. God, further, is an individual, a person, with a Divine body, and a Divine abode. God, according to Rāmānuja, is in need of the universe, which is a necessary phase of the self-realisation of God. In this respect Rāmānuja seems to be similar to Hegel who treats the universe as an eternal differentiation of the all-inclusive Absolute. Like Rāmānuja Hegel also identifies the Absolute and God. Philosophy is to him the rational explanation of the true context of religious faith, and the only difference between the Absolute and God is that the former is Ultimate Reality interpreted in terms of pure thought, whereas the latter is the same reality represented in terms of imagination and emotion. But in Hegel we find another line of thought in which he reduces everything finite into something illusory. And here he completely breaks away from Rāmānuja.
It is truly remarked about Rāmānuja that he has given us 'the best type of monotheism conceivable, inset with touches of immanentism'. No one can deny the greatness of the intrinsic value of his philosophy, specially his concept of God as an organic whole which does not deny its parts but harmonises them in its own Being, though it transcends them. In Rāmānuja we find a sincere attempt to reconcile the demands of the religious feeling with the claims of logical thinking. 'Much more remarkable is the deep earnestness and hard logic with which he conceived the problem and laboured to bridge the yawning gulf between the apparently conflicting claims of religion and philosophy'.

His religious feeling seizes on the concrete idea of God as a person and his philosophic spirit enables him to conceive the finite things and beings as moments in the life of God.

Rāmānuja's anthropomorphism criticised

Inspite of the sincere attempt of Rāmānuja to reconcile the truth of philosophy and the truth of religion, the personal and the impersonal aspects of God, we sometimes find his mind oscillating between personal and anthropomorphic concepts of God. This becomes clear from his two different irreconcilable descriptions of the body of God. So long as he regards matter and souls as body of God, he is true to his basic ontological standpoint, and merits our appreciation. But when he starts giving the account of the anthropomorphic body, form, abode, consorts, retinue etc. of God we feel perplexed and alarmed. Such an attempt is certainly a concession to the figurative and mythological tendency and to the habit of the religious consciousness to embody its description of God in an anthropomorphic way. In this adulteration of anthropomorphism in the metaphysical truth Rāmānuja loses the severity of his metaphysical contemplation and gives vent to mythological fancy.
To call God a person is not a sign of anthropomorphism. God is a person not in the sense of having a physical body, but in the sense that He is a self-existent and self-conscious Being having perfect freedom of will. He is also a person in the sense that He is love-incarnate. As Royce has put it, 'The divine love is not a thing of God, it is God Himself.' Mettaggart writes, 'It is in love and in nothing else that we find not only the Supreme value of life, but also the supreme reality of life and indeed of the universe.'

So there is nothing wrong in interpreting Brahmán as personal and determinate, but to do so on the basis of superstitions and a very wide extrapolation of the constitution of human beings is quite irrelevant to, and out of place in, his metaphysics. Sentimental expressions like these fall short of the highest expressions of truth. Sankara is rightly criticised for elevating Absolute to such a height from which there is no path to lead down to the low lands of humanity. But against Ramanuja also it must be said that his fascinating description of the body etc., of God based on some scriptural sayings and on arbitrary fancy incapable of verification, carries no conviction, and gives rise to a genuine doubt as to whether there is a corresponding reality. Here a question demands our attention. Does the ontological position of Ramanuja justify these anthropomorphic accretions based on popular imagination and figurative consciousness? One must frankly admit that such sentimental vagaries are quite superfluous, unwarranted and uncalled for in his ontological set up, and do not befit a man of penetrating intellectual vision. We appreciate his attempt to reconcile the demands of religious feeling with the claims of logical thinking, but to subdue intellectual penetration before
mythological fancy associated with low religious sentiments is quite deplorable. He should have kept himself aloof from narrow orthodoxy and sentimentalism and should have exercised discriminate faculty proper to a true philosopher. It is true that a thinker who is reaching forward to a larger conception of truth should not break entirely from the common beliefs of his age, but this does not mean that he should justify all forms of superstitions etc. which become associated with religion. It is certainly expected of him not to incorporate them in their crudest forms. His attitude should be sympathetic and critical. He may not attack old dogmas violently and thereby injure popular hearts, but he can quietly reject them suggesting something more reasonable which is at the same time more spiritual too.

In this respect we appreciate Śaṅkara's repugnance to anthropomorphism. His agnosticism is more rational than indulgence in baseless fancies. Śaṅkara could successfully refuse to lower his philosophical standards in order to accommodate common mythological feelings. It is a great merit of Śaṅkara that he could free himself from all such illusions and could restrain the tendency of indulging in 'outrages on the chastity of thought'.

However this much must be said in favour of Rāmānuja that his views are based on Vedic scriptures. The fault of Rāmānuja lies in his blind acceptance of these texts literally on the authority of the Bhāsyakāra who maintains that 'yathā bhūtavādi hi śāstram', i.e., scriptures assert things as they are. On the basis of this fact J. A. B. Van Buitenen has tried to defend Rāmānuja against the criticism of Dr. Radhakrishnan. He writes that other worldly stories never sound convincing to unbelieving ears. These descriptions of Rāmānuja are based on
scriptures and their validity depends on faith and not on proof. He argues that if these texts, the authority of which is the very foundation of orthodox metaphysical thought, happen to speak about the golden splendour of God, about the supreme immaterial heaven, about angelic beings eternally absorbed in the contemplation of God's essence, and if Rāmānuja accepts them in their literal sense, he should not be made responsible for that.

We do not agree with Buitenen in this defence of Rāmānuja. As regards the contents of these descriptions we cannot throw any blame on Rāmānuja, nevertheless we cannot give him a clean chit with regard to his accepting and borrowing these descriptions uncritically on the basis of blind faith.

Rāmānuja and Pāncarātra School—a study in contrast

It has been generally maintained by many scholars that Rāmānuja's concept of God, very much influenced by the Pāncarātra view, and that he has made a bold attempt to give a Vedāntic basis to the non-vedic Pāncarātra theology. We, therefore, propose to see how far this contention is true and justified.

The Pāncarātra thinkers like the advaitin, tend to make a distinction between the Absolute of Philosophy and the God of Religion. Originally there is only one Supreme Reality which is unambiguously declared to be Nirguna etc. It has been ascribed almost all those negative epithets with which the Upaniṣads describe the Ultimate Reality. This Impersonal Brahman, One and the Only Reality, appears as personal God due to māyā or śakti. In the Nārāyanīya the personal form is said to be assumādg only for the purpose of devotion and worship. This means the personal form has meaning and value for the purpose of
worship only, and is ultimately not-real. In the Samhitās the Brahman is said to have appeared as personal, due to His Sakti, for the purpose of creation, but this personal God is, in all respects, less than the Absolute. Because after all it is not the whole, but a mere aspect, and therefore mere appearance, so that He and with Him religion, must suffer the transforming plunge into the ultimate metaphysical one. This conclusion seems to be quite inevitable in the Pāñcarātra philosophy. After declaring God of religion (i.e. Vāsudeva) as a later appearance and hence a reality of a lower order, the Pāñcarātra school has no choice but to accept its ultimate unreality. Religion then becomes merely a practical affair, its images and concepts, being wholly concerned with the fulfilment of practical ends. Though this conclusion would be unpalatable to the modern viśiṣṭādvaitins, we cannot legitimately draw any conclusion other than this.

The Pāñcarātra thinkers do not emphasise the Māyāvāda of the Advaita Vedānta, but their predominantly transcendent Absolute seems to be a denial of the plurality of the immanent being and consciousness. Indeed, the Absolute has been made so much transcendent that we may conceive the continuity of immanent life side by side with the Absolute without any harm or detriment to its absolute character. Though immanent life and consciousness run side by side with Transcendent Being, in the silence of this transcendence, the immanent experience has no place. From some of the extremely advaitic utterances of the Samhitās, one can only be led to think that the Absolute is the only reality, the immanent expression is not the reality and in so far as it has any reality it is non-different from the Absolute Being. In fact such a conclusion is against the spi-
rit of the practical Pāñcarātra school but this alone is its legitimate theoretical position. From the above it will not be wrong to maintain with Prof. P.T. Srinivasa Aiengar that the teachings of the Pāñcarātra Samhitās tend towards advaitism. 187

The Pāñcarātra thinkers not only emphasise the Absolute and the transcendent nature of Brahman, but also regard Him as a Being self-centred and self-contented, so much so that He is not in the least concerned with the mundane world. In their eagerness to preserve and emphasise the purity, perfection and transcendent nature of Brahman, they give rise to the view that it is not the Supreme Being who is responsible for creation, sustenance and absorption of the universe. He Himself does not create the universe, and remains quite unaffected by the changes which are necessary to bring about the universe. He is the unchanging One who though unchanging is the basis of all changes. In order to preserve the Divine transcendence and perfection which seem incompatible with His being an active agent in relation to the universe, attempts are made by these thinkers to introduce mediating principles like Śakti, Vyūhas, creator, Brahmā etc. to relate the Supreme Being to the universe.

In this respect the Supreme Being of the Pāñcarātra comes nearer to the concept of an 'Absentee Deity' or 'Slumbering God'. He has been aptly described in the Samhitās as 'windless atmosphere' or 'motionless sea' who is 'darkness' and 'emptiness' everywhere. To speak of such waveless stage and a quietness in the Absolute and also of its transcendent changeless nature which remains intact even in the process of creation, resembles the Absolutistic position of the advaitins.

Like the advaitins the Pāñcarātra thinkers so much emphasise the transcendence of God that they forget entirely His
immanent aspect. Consequently they have to posit a series of emanations of God and other intermediaries to relate Him to the world. This necessitated giving rise to the cardinal Pāṇcarātra dogma of five-fold manifestation of God. But the Pāṇcarātra thinkers never equated Brahman with all these five forms individually or taken together. It is not Brahman Himself who appears in these forms. These forms rather emanate from Him and the speciality of this process of emanation is that in it while bringing the product into existence the source of the product remains unchanged. Since Brahman alone is ultimately Real, these manifestations are only phenomenal and they do not enjoy the same ontological status which Brahman does.

The very transcendence of God in the Pāṇcarātra signifies an artificial relation with the world. But such a Deity, 'wholly other', is as good as bad as the Absolute of the advaitin, with whom we can maintain no relations, from whom we can cherish no hopes, and to whom we can offer no oblations. To be wholly other is for us to be nothing at all. We recognise the uniqueness and perfection, transcendence and supra-mundane existence of God, but in being sheer transcendent He hopelessly falls short of our expectations. Neither religious experience nor a true philosophy can rest contented with such a God, conceived after static category, who has no unfulfilled purposes, unsolved problems and who needs not wait upon us. The concept of God as a static self-contained Being who cannot function dynamically in time and cannot enter into reciprocal intercourse with the finite spirits, cannot be speculatively satisfying. It leaves unanswered a fundamental problem, why the Absolute who is eternally perfect, to whom there is nothing unaccomplished, should instruct the 'Śakti or Brahma' to create the universe? Further,
in what relation does the unrelated Absolute stand to that universe? Are both the perfect Absolute and the imperfect universe real? Strictly speaking both cannot be so, otherwise, we will have to give some place to the imperfect world in the perfect Absolute, which is manifestly a contradiction. So in order to preserve the perfection of Brahman the Pāñcarātra thinkers will have to regard the world as something not real. Then we seem to get an Absolute in which all is lost, though the Pāñcarātrins may explain that everything is found. The fundamental defect with both Sankara and Pāñcarātra thinkers is that they drew a distinction between Godhead who is wholly beyond and God who works and creates. They start with a static, inert and empty Absolute arrived at by a kind of via negativa and through it they try to explain the world. The more fruitful method is to start from the concrete world and to transfer to the Absolute the most significant and revealing features of our experience. The Absolute then comes to be a system of relations, a system in which every element of experience has a place and meaning not in their coarse form, but in a transmuted form.* Bradley, inspite of his monistic logic, could perceive this truth and conceived Absolute as the unity in which all things coming together are transmuted, in which they are changed all alike, though not changed equally. 188

Rāmānuja's conception of God contrasted with that of the Pāñcarātra

Rāmānuja, on the contrary, repudiates the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent Being, the Impersonal Absolute and the Personal God, a dichotomy in the Godhead. The double aspect of the Pāñcarātra philosophy presents us with a two-fold category—transcendental and empirical. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, consistently refused to be drawn into this divi-
son. For him the Ultimate Reality is one and one only, which is at once both transcendent and immanent. To him the categories of transcendence and immanence are not contradictory and incompatible. Therefore, he resents śaṅkara's (and thereby of the Pāṇcarātra as well) bifurcation of Reality into transcendent and immanent. Rāmānuja, unlike the Pāṇcarātra school and Śaṅkara, does not understand transcendence of God in the sense that He is alien to, or apart from, or unrelated to, the universe. God transcends the world of things and spirits, for He is not limited to them either individually or collectively. He is beyond them in the sense that while they intimately depend on Him and He acts on them, His self-consciousness does not depend on them. God's transcendence lies in the fact that the spatial and temporal world is a manifestation of the Divine will, but He Himself is beyond the spatial and temporal order. He is the transcendent Ground of the whole world and invests it with the order which comes of its constant dependence on Him. Further God is transcendent in the sense that He is a perfect personality with a unique character of His own, which is untouched by the mutation of matter and limitations of finite spirits.

Unlike the Pāṇcarātra, Rāmānuja does not fight shy of the immanence of God. By being immanent God does not become imperfect or impure. To Rāmānuja immanence means something different from pantheistic identification. God is immanent in the sense that He is the Inner soul of the Universe and the Universe constitutes. His body, that means all sentient beings and non-sentient things are completely controlled and supported by God for His own ends, and are absolutely subordinate to Him. That is, God brings the world into being as an utterance of Himself and
continually sustains it by the energy of His will.

Thus the position of Rāmānuja is fundamentally opposed to that of the Pāṇcarātra. In his panentheistic system both transcendence and immanence are reconciled and are given their due places. It is one and the same Being who is both immanent and transcendent. Rāmānuja never bothers to preserve the bare transcendence of God by introducing the intermediaries like Śakti, Vyūhas etc. in the creation of the world, because according to him God inspite of being immanent in the world, can remain unaffected by the changes, etc. of the world, just as the soul is not touched by the pains, miseries and imperfections of the body. Therefore, as against the Pāṇcarātra, Rāmānuja emphasises the intimate and inseparable organic relation with which the Deity stands related to the universe.

The fundamental difference between Rāmānuja and the Pāṇcarātra starts with the dynamic and static concept of Reality. Rāmānuja upholds the dynamic character of Being, in which he finds the possibility of inner self-revelation and unfoldment. This basic conception naturally leads him to build up a synthesis of Being and attributes, and to unite the extremes of abstraction, either of substance without attributes or of attributes without substance. The Pāṇcarātra, however, favours the static concept, as a result of which it could only conceive the Supreme Being as a bare identity and not a unity. There is no outwardness or inwardness, a going out or coming in, in the self-revelation of Being for it is stillness and sameness everywhere, in every point of its existence. But the Pāṇcarātra thinkers could not remain for long satisfied with this unhappy position, for it does not gratify fully the religious fervour. So they had to bring in the dynamic concept through some other way. In Śankara this nece-
ssitated for the concept of māya, and in the Pāñcarātra for the Šakti, Vyūhas and creator Brahmā. It is this necessity which is responsible for the queer combination of Deism and Pantheism in the Pāñcarātra philosophy.

Prof. Kumarappa's argument regarding the Pāñcarātra impact on Rāmānuja refuted

Having reviewed the fundamental position of Pāñcarātra school and Rāmānuja, we may now proceed to examine the view that Rāmānuja in formulating his concept of God, has borrowed substantially from the Pāñcarātra. So far as the ontological position of the two is concerned, as we have seen, they fundamentally differ. Now it remains to be seen whether they share any theological beliefs. This we shall do by pointing out the extent to which the two agree and also by tracing out the source of such ideas and beliefs which Rāmānuja holds in common with the Pāñcarātra.

In repudiating the idea of God as a substance devoid of all attributes, Rāmānuja maintains that God is the Highest Person whose essential nature is knowledge characterised by bliss and who is possessed of unlimited number of auspicious attributes. Very frequently Rāmānuja dwells with great emotion on the attributes of God, such as knowledge, bliss, brilliance, beauty, comeliness, compassion, generosity, goodness, love etc. and along with these he also quotes six attributes from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, viz., glory, strength, dominion, wisdom, energy and power, which are characteristically ascribed to Para Vāsudeva (not the Supreme Being) in the Pāñcarātra. Rāmānuja simply enumerates these attributes and does not dwell upon them.

It is said that the concept of God as a person full of
all imaginable auspicious attributes, devoid of all evils and as possessing six dominant attributes, was borrowed by Rāmānuja from the Pāñcarātra and Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Prof. Kumarappa, for example, holds that the idea of God as having excellent attributes, has been obtained by Rāmānuja from his religious sect. Only that part of his teaching, he opines, is based on the Upaniṣads which describes thought and bliss as constituting the essential nature of Brahman. Kumarappa writes, 'But it may be asked where did Rāmānuja obtain this doctrine? He claims that Scripture (i.e., in this case, the Upaniṣads) teaches it. But our own account of the Upaniṣads has already shown that no such clearly formulated doctrine is to be found in them.'

It is rather injudicious on the part of Prof. Kumarappa to opine that Rāmānuja makes a false claim for the Upaniṣadic basis of his views. Kumarappa himself accepts that 'the conception of Brahman as an all perfect Being characterised by grace is not altogether absent even in the Upaniṣads,' and while dealing with the philosophy of the Upaniṣads he elaborately explains this point, yet quite inconsistently he remarks that this doctrine of Rāmānuja has no basis in the Upaniṣads. Kumarappa writes that 'the Upaniṣadic passages which he (Rāmānuja) cites as teaching his view of the nature of Brahman are so few and uncertain in meaning that we may be sure that he did not derive his doctrine from them.' This argument is quite baseless mainly because upaniṣadic passages teaching personal aspect of the Ultimate Reality are not few in number and as regards their uncertainty many of the upaniṣadic utterances bear such character. If the accounts of the Upaniṣads were quite clear and consistent, what was the need to write commentaries to systematise them.

Further Prof. Kumarappas writes, 'Besides, his (Rāmānuja's
very eagerness to claim support for his view from Scripture seems to reveal the fact that he obtained his doctrine from other sources." 193 This argument is quite inconsistent with the immediately preceding sentences in which Prof. Kumarappa writes that Rāmānuja was aware of the fact that in the scripture no clearly formulated basis is found for his view. Firstly Prof. Kumarappa is wrong in saying that there is no such basis in the Scripture. Secondly, if there was no such basis in the Scripture and if Rāmānuja were aware of it, why was he eager to claim support from the Scripture? As a matter of fact, the attempt of Prof. Kumarappa to falsify the account of Rāmānuja himself and to impute to him what he disowns, is quite unwarranted. 194

Another argument, Prof. Kumarappa puts forth in support of his thesis is that 'after showing that his doctrine regarding the nature of Brahman is taught by Scripture, Rāmānuja proceeds to show that it is also taught by the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and the passages which he cites so fully reflect the view which he advocates throughout the Śrī Bhasya, that Brahman is the highest person, characterised by the most blessed attributes, and free from all evil qualities, that it is not by any means improbable that it is to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in particular and Vaiṣṇavism in general, that Rāmānuja turned for his doctrine regarding the nature of the Deity. 194 Here we reiterate that Rāmānuja's conception of God is not at all absent in the Upaniṣads and that it is wrong to trace its source to Vaiṣṇavism. As regards the Viṣṇu Purāṇa Rāmānuja has clearly declared it as an authority as good as the Gita and the Mahābhārata. He also regards it as corroborating the Upaniṣads. 125 Not only Rāmānuja but Śaṅkara also quotes from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in his Bhasya on the Brahma-sūtra as an authority. Prof. Kumarappa is very much mistaken in
Ramanuja's view of God as free from evil—not Pāṇcarātric

Similarly Prof. Kumarappa holds that Rāmānuja has derived the idea of God devoid of all evils from the Vaiṣṇavism. He writes, 'Another point is also noticeable, though it cannot be said to be peculiarly Vaiṣṇava, for, as we have seen, it is not lacking entirely even in the Upaniṣads—the view, namely, that the Deity is a perfect being, in whom there is no evil. But while in the Upaniṣads this doctrine is never clearly or consistently formulated, the Śrī Bhāṣya passages we have cited show Rāmānuja consistently maintaining that Brahman has only auspicious qualities, and that He is entirely free from evil qualities. 196

Here Prof. Kumarappa does not do justice to the Upaniṣads. He himself writes that, 'In this way Rāmānuja brings to full fruition the tendency of some of the Upaniṣads to ascribe numerous perfections to the Supreme Being.' 197 Or elsewhere he writes, 'When, however, we turn to the later Upaniṣads, it seems likely that Brahman was regarded as free from evil, understood also in its moral sense.' 198 He in great details deals with how in the Upaniṣads Brahman is conceived as possessing many transcendent qualities and perfections including the moral one. If this idea is already there clearly formulated in the Upaniṣads, there is no reason why Prof. Kumarappas should try to trace to Vaiṣṇavism the inspiration for Rāmānuja to make this idea central in his view of the Deity. Not only the Upaniṣads, but the Viṣṇu purāṇa also makes it very clear that Brahman is free from all defects, and that nothing but auspicious qualities constitute His nature.
The six attributes of God mentioned by Rāmānuja are based on Pāñcarātra.

In the similar manner Prof. Kumarappa smells sectarianism in Rāmānuja’s reference to the six qualities of the Lord, which are characteristic in the Pāñcarātra school. He writes, ‘He (Rāmānuja) at any rate found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa a description of the blessed qualities of the Deity, which description he failed to find except in a very meagre form in the Upaniṣads.’

Then he reproduces passages of Viṣṇu Purāṇa which Rāmānuja has cited in the Śrī Bhāṣya and remarks, ‘There are two points worthy of note in connection with the qualities above enumerated, for they reveal ideas not to be found in the Upaniṣads, and hence are to be regarded as distinctly sectarian. Rāmānuja accepts them, though there is no warrant for them in the Upaniṣads, and they form a fundamental part of his view regarding the Deity. One of them is the enumeration of six qualities—glory, strength, dominion, wisdom, energy and power—as belonging to Brahman.’

Here Prof. Kumarappa forgets that for Rāmānuja the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is also an authority and that it is not a sectarian work. These six qualities, it is true, play an important part in the Pāñcarātra philosophy but they form no less important part of the nature of Deity in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. These qualities in the Pāñcarātra are associated, not with the Supreme Being, but with Para Vāsudeva, whereas in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa they are mentioned as the qualities of the Supreme Being. In Rāmānuja also these qualities are associated with the Supreme Being.

Any way there can be no doubt about it that Rāmānuja has borrowed this idea from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa only, and it is significant that in the few citations given by Rāmānuja from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa these qualities are repeated as many as three times. If Rāmānuja accepts
these qualities on the authority of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, there is nothing sectarian about it.

Loving nature of God accepted by Rāmānuja is not non-Vedic

Another point that Rāmānuja seems to share with the Pañcarātra and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is that the Deity is characterised by the abiding love for His devotees. This idea, according to Prof. Kumararappu, has been borrowed by Rāmānuja from the religious sect to which he belonged. But Prof. Kumararappu overlooks the fact that right from the Rigvedic period Viṣṇu has come down to be a God of grace and that the burden of the teaching of the Śvetāśvatara and some other minor Upaniṣads and the Gītā is that the Deity is eminently loving. In holding any particular idea, doctrine or belief there is no monopoly of any particular sect or denomination, and if one idea is held by two schools together it should not provoke one to make a hasty conclusion that one of them has borrowed it from the other. Further Prof. Kumararappu has failed to discern a point of subtle difference. In Rāmānuja it is the Supreme Being Himself who out of love manifests Himself by assuming numerous forms so as to delight the hearts of the devotees. This is perfectly in accordance with the Gītā and with the Scriptural saying viz., 'ājyamāno bahudhā vijāyate'. But in the Pañcarātra the Supreme Being being static, transcendent and wholly other, He Himself cannot have any feeling of love towards individual souls and, therefore, cannot manifest Himself... It is only the phenomenal God, the God of religious aspiration, who is endowed with this quality.
The Pāñcarātra dogma of five-fold manifestation of God not found in Rāmānuja

Another element that Rāmānuja is alleged to have borrowed is the cardinal Pāñcarātra dogma of five-fold manifestation of the Deity. Though the only Supreme Being the Pāñcarātra thinkers conceived of was the one Transcendent Brahman, they could no longer remain satisfied with Him and soon recognised the Deity in five-fold forms, viz., Para, Vyūha, Vibhava, Antaryāmin and Arcā. The Supreme Being Himself does not assume all these forms, since He is unable to do so on account of His transcendent and changeless nature. Therefore, strictly speaking, all these are not manifestations of but only emanations from the Supreme Being. These five forms are purely in relation to the world, have meaning for the world only and exist so long as the world exists.

In the works of Rāmānuja we do not come across this five-fold dogma. From his treatment of the Pāñcarātra school under the Brahma-sūtras II-2-39 to 42, which is the only reference to the Pāñcarātra in all his works, it appears as if he was not aware of this five-fold dogma. There he refers to the Pauskaṇḍika Samhitā in which four-fold forms are taught, but he enumerates only three, viz., Sukṣma (which perhaps means Para), Vyūha and Vibhava. Not only he does not mention all the five forms, but he also does not expound the three forms that he enumerates. He simply mentions them as doctrines accepted and advocated by the Pāñcarātra school, and further upholds their non-contradiction to the Scripture, and the favourable attitude of the Sūtrakāra towards them. How far Rāmānuja is justified in doing so, we shall deal with elsewhere. But the point that interests us here is that he has shown no inclination of incorporating them. It is
therefore a misgiving of the scholars to write that Rāmānuja has incorporated in his theology this Pāñcarātra dogma. Prof. Kumarappa confesses that 'The doctrine being sectarian Rāmānuja does not systematically expound it' and yet quite inconsistently he maintains that Rāmānuja 'recognised all these forms.'

(a) Prof. Kumarappa identifies the 'Para' form of the Pāñcarātra with Rāmānuja's Deity which exists in the heavenly world with Śrī and a host of eternal beings. But Prof. Kumarappa here overlooks the ontological status of the 'Para' of the Pāñcarātra and the Deity of Rāmānuja. In the Pāñcarātra 'Para' is not the Supreme Being but merely an emanation from it, phenomenal in nature but in Rāmānuja it is the Supreme Being Himself who resides in the heavenly world with Śrī, and He is not a manifestation of, or emanation from, any one else. Thus there is no point in saying that the two are identical.

(b) We agree with Prof. Kumarappa that Rāmānuja speaks with approval of the doctrine of Vyūhas in establishing that the Vedānta Sūtras do not mean to reject the Pāñcarātra. Rāmānuja does so on the authority of the Mahābhārata. But this does not mean that Rāmānuja himself has accepted and incorporated this doctrine. The doctrine of Vyūha, which is essentially cosmological principle, finds no place in the cosmology of Rāmānuja. Except under the Vedānta Sūtras II.2.40-43 no where does this doctrine appear in his works.

(c) Rāmānuja deals with the doctrine of incarnation. But this doctrine is not peculiar to the Pāñcarātra. The idea of avatāras is by no means alien to the character of Viṣṇu who from the Vedic times was recognised as a God of grace and as saviour of the world. The fundamental difference between the Pāñcarātra and Rāmānuja with regard to this doctrine is that in the Pāñcarātra the Deity Himself does not incarnate. This task is assigned
there to the Vyūhas. But in Rāmānuja it is the Deity Himself who incarnates, without putting away His God-like nature. Secondy, unlike the Pāñcarātra Rāmānuja does not dwell on the forms, goddesses, activities etc. of various vātāras and the mythological fancies related to them.

According to Rāmānuja there are two motives for incarnation. The first motive which is propounded in the Gītā is to uphold righteousness. The second one is to gratify His devotees. This motive is peculiar to the Pāñcarātra and the Ālvārs. On this basis Prof. Kumarappa holds that Rāmānuja has borrowed it from them. But this inference of Prof. Kumarappa may not be true, because the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (VI.6.47ff) also teaches the same view and it is most likely that Rāmānuja has derived it from there.

(d) Rāmānuja declares God as Antaryāmn, i.e., Inner Ruler. He declares that Brahman resides within the world and controls it from within. This view claims a long descent of which there is abundant evidence in the Upaniṣads. It goes back at least to a time as remote as that of the Anantāyāmin Brāhmaṇa of the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (III.7.3to 22) where we find its classical formulation. The same view appears also in the later Upaniṣads. (e.g., Īs I, Katha V.9v13, Śve.I.16, VI.II, VI.34, Mundaka II.4 & 9). This is the view taught in the Gītā (X. 19 & 20) as well. On these as well as on the authority of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (VIII.I.I.) Rāmānuja declares that Brahman abides as the Inner Ruler in the heart of the devotee for the purposes of meditation.

This idea of God as Antaryāmin is not the same as the Pāñcarātra idea of Antaryāmin manifestation of God, as Prof. Kumarappa has wrongly thought it to be. In the Pāñcarātra
the Inner Ruler is not the Supreme Being, but Aniruddha. Further Aniruddha is Inner Ruler of the souls only and not of the material world. But in Rāmānuja the whole world constitutes the body of God and, therefore, God is the Inner Ruler of the material world as well as of the individual souls. Thirdly, in Rāmānuja God resides permanently in the world as its Inner Soul whereas in the Pāñcarātra Aniruddha takes a special descent for this purpose. Lastly, the concept of Antaryāmin as a form of the Deity is different from the concept of Antaryāmin as the soul of the world.

(e) The Pāñcarātra school is very much given to the worship of arcās, which is the last of the five-fold manifestation of the Deity. Like other forms this arcā form is also for the purposes of worship. We may say that the Pāñcarātra thinkers have accepted it as a concession to the religious consciousness.

Rāmānuja does not mention at all this form of the Deity, and to argue that Rāmānuja must have favoured it because the Śrīvaishṇava tradition mentions him to be a worshipper at the shrine of the great Śrī Rangam Temple, is quite baseless, mainly because the Śrīvaishṇava tradition is quite unhistorical and unreliable, and whatever the bigoted followers say need not be true and acceptable.

The form, abode, consort etc. of God in Rāmānuja is different from the Pāñcarātra

Rāmānuja lays emphasis on the concrete nature of God and begins his commentary on the Gītā with a mythological description of the form and abode of the Deity in a Paurāṇic way which has no philosophical significance, and such descriptions are found in the Vedārthasamgraha as well. These accounts at places have striking similarities with the Pāñcarātra accounts.
This has prompted Prof. Kumarappa to attribute sectarian motive to Rāmānuja. But on the basis of the citations given by Rāmānuja from Rgveda etc., we can be sure that Rāmānuja has a purely Vedic basis for this belief. This can be substantiated from the differences prevailing between Rāmānuja’s belief and Pāñcarātra belief. The fundamental difference between the two is that this form and abode in Rāmānuja pertains to the Ultimate Reality, whereas in the Pāñcarātra the Ultimate Reality being formless, it is only Para Vāsudeva, the Personal Deity, who is associated with these form and abode. Further, in the Pāñcarātra the form and abode of the Deity come into existence only in the process of pure creation, but in Rāmānuja these are not the outcome of any process of creation. In the Pāñcarātra this abode of the Deity is said to be made of some special stuff called Śuddha Sattva. Some scholars have wrongly thought that Rāmānuja has accepted the Pāñcarātra view that the abode of God is made of ‘Śuddha Sattva’. Under this impression Prof. Sirkar writes, ‘we confess we cannot understand what kind of substance Rāmānuja’s Śuddha Sattva is’. But we should make it quite clear that Rāmānuja nowhere mentions this element. He has not said anything about the stuff out of which the abode of God is made. He only says this much that it is not physical or empirical. Rāmānuja mentions Śrī as the consort of God and quotes Veda authority in support of it. The concept of Śrī plays an important part in the Pāñcarātra philosophy as well, but there she is essentially a creative principle and a mediator between the Deity and devotee. This aspect of Śrī is not present in Rāmānuja.

On the basis of the above examination the conclusion we arrive at is that Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra school differ fundamentally. Those ideas that seem common in them have an appa-
rent similarity only for they differ widely in details. The similarity in respect of such ideas and inspirations need not by any means necessarily imply borrowing on either side. Secondly, this circumstance can also be explained by the fact that both have a common source of information. The philosophy of Rāmānuja is mainly upaniṣadic, being supported by the Gītā and the Viśṇu Purāṇa in its theology. There is no doubt about it that Pāñcarātra has borrowed a lot from the Upaniṣads. The conclusion that Rāmānuja has not borrowed these ideas from the Pāñcarātra is evinced from this that whenever Rāmānuja expresses such ideas he seeks support from the Upaniṣads etc. and not from the Pāñcarātra works. Both Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra school have repeated and reasserted some common theological principles which had been furnished to them by the Upaniṣads, and hence one is likely to find some similarity between them.

Rāmānuja and Ālvārs-a study in contrast

Some scholars are of the opinion that Rāmānuja was a follower of the Ālvārs and gave an intellectual championship to their intense religious experience. Through the Śrīvaiśṇava ācāryas he is regarded to have inherited the Ālvār religion of passionate devotion. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes, 'His study of the Ālvārs and his training by the Ācāryas helped him to develop elements which otherwise would have remained latent in the Upaniṣads and the Brahma-sūtras'.

In the previous section we have observed that these scholars had alleged the impact of the Pāñcarātra on Rāmānuja but there was no ground for this allegation. Let us see how far the alleged impact of the Ālvārs on Rāmānuja is true. It will not be superfluous to repeat here what we have said in the intro-
duction that there are some scholars who opine that the Ālvārs were rather the disciples of Rāmānuja. If this were true the very basis of the above allegation crumbles down.

It is really a very difficult task to undertake a comparative study of the Ālvārs and Rāmānuja mainly because the Ālvārs are purely religious whereas Rāmānuja is essentially philosophical. The Ālvārs move with faith in the wonderlands of myths and legends and leave their imagination free to roam at large in the realm of faith. No distinction is drawn between mythological fancy and religious truth, fiction and fact. Rāmānuja although gives due recognition to such mythological fancies, he does not remain entangled in them but steers away to the realm of logic and reflection. He, under the impact of Scripture, sometimes mixes up mythology with philosophy and religion, but this does not affect his philosophy. Rāmānuja does not accept the religious experience uncritically, but he tries to prove its basis in the super-empirical Reality. Intrusions of mythical elements in his philosophy certainly do not have any rational basis, but they have their basis in the Scripture.

Like the Ālvārs, Rāmānuja also dwells on the beauty of the form of God, but he does so with no touch of emoticism. For him God is not a eros-producing mate but the soul of the world. He does not describe the form of God in an amorous language. But the Ālvārs feel, and describe, the Lord as a Lover who has stolen their heart. They not only express their rapturous passions and ardent amorous longings, but also describe the reciprocation of love on the part of the Lord who is described as being infatuated with the beauty and charm of the beloved, the Ālvārs. Such an experience of a constant company of the Lord in a delirious state and such rapturous reciprocation of ravishing love and
and enticement on the part of God, are altogether absent in Ramanuja.

The Alvars are very much given to the worship of God in the form of arcás, idols. They are so much engrossed in this form that they completely forget His transcendent aspect. The idea of a personal God satisfies the deepest yearning of all religious people all over the world. No religion can therefore escape from symbolism and icons employed to focus its faith. The emotional nature and finitude of man requires some definite object of worship and adoration, help and protection. The idol of God brings to man, what philosophy can never give him, a present and accessible God. Brahman being beyond thought and speech, can never be any man's what an idol is. That God alone can hold the human heart to whom man turns in prayer at any moment and receive help from Him. Otto maintains that the essence of religion is to assume that the real presence of the transcendent and holy is possible and can be laid hold of and enjoyed in the present possession.

But the image is not God. It is only a representation of God and not a presentation of Him. It is merely a means to enable the worshipper to visualise God and to give him something concrete on which to fix his attention, and to convince him of the Reality, the transcendental. Therefore, the image should not be regarded as God Himself, something final. The religious thought should seek to pass beyond the limits of mere symbolism in its endeavour to relate the symbol to reality. To be content with symbolism without raising any question about the truth of that which it symbolises, is to be satisfied with mere subjectivity. This gives rise to slender idolatry and the belief that some idols are the actual incarnations of God and
not mere symbols, and that there are many gods residing in separate places each one to be worshipped with particular articles of worship etc. This sort of idolatry we find in the Pāñcarātra and the Ālvars, but it is absent in Rāmānuja.

All the doctrines and dogmas of the religion of the Ālvars are, thus, conspicuously absent in Rāmānuja, except one, viz., the concept of the God of grace and devotion. But unlike the Ālvars this idea does not occupy a privileged place in Rāmānuja and as we have seen in connection with the comparative study of Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra school, this idea is found in a fully developed form in the Vedāntic scriptures.

From the above it is quite evident that there is no ground for the contention of the scholars that Rāmānuja was influenced by the Ālvars.
References and footnotes:

1. Brhadāraṇyaka III.4.2.; III.7.2.3; Mankada III,1.3., Kena 3; Katha VI.12, II.6.9.

2. Śārīraka Bhaṣya of Śaṅkara III.2.23


4. Śrī Bhaṣya I.1.3, II.1.12.

5. Katha II.6.8, Kena I,3ff. etc.

6. Śvetāsvatara IV.15 ff.

7. Mundaka II.3.2.

8. XI.8.


10. Śrī Bhaṣya I.2.23. By scripture Rāmānuja means only the Veda, Upaniṣads, Vedānta Sūtras, Śārīra like Gītā, Viśṇu Purāṇa and some portions of the Mahābhārata (Śrī Bhaṣya-II-I,1, I,1.1). He does not include the Pāṇcarātra Samhitās in the Scriptures.


13. Jayākhyā S.IV.76.

14. नौकाभिन्नतत्त्वो ज्ञातं अत्र मन्युष्ये ते परम्।

15. एवतथा न विद्वेष िश्चार्गितस स्वशस्ते।

16. Ibid 337.19


18. Ibid 337.12.

19. Ibid 337.19

20. Ibid 337.18 53

21. Śārīraka Bhaṣya I.2.14

23. Ibid C.1.1.8
24. Ibid C.1.1.6.
25. Ibid C.1.2.1
26. Supra F.N. 15
27. Tiruvāyoli C.1.1.3.
28. Sacred Books of the East series vol. XXXIV first two pp.XXIV-V
30. Śrī Bhaṣya I.1.1.
31. Ibid. The last argument of Rāmānuja does not appear to be a sound one, unless it is interpreted in the Jaina sense of anekatvādā, for which there is no basis here.
32. Ibid I.1.1.
34. Ibid I.1.1
35. Ibid I.1.1
36. Ibid I.1.1. see Kumarappa Loc. cit. pp.179-185 for details
37. Ibid I.1.1.
38. Rāmānuja summarises the advaitin's position as follows: The advaitin puts forth two grounds for his contention: (i) while all other things are seen to exist in relation to consciousness, which thus explains and illuminates all, consciousness alone is not explained in relation to anything other than itself, for consciousness is self-illumined. It therefore proves itself as well as all other kinds of beings and hence is supremely real. (ii) Secondly, since difference is ultimately unreal, all things other than pure undifferentiated consciousness are ultimately unreal. Ibid.I.1.1.
39. Ibid I.1.1. See DasGupta pp.168ff. for details
40. Ibid I.1.1. I.1.12, See Kumarappa Loc. cit.pp.177.78
41. Ibid I.1.2
42. Sarvātmā-Śve.up.III.21
43. Pārāma Brahma-Taitt. up.II.12
44. Pārāma Jyotiḥ- ch.up.VIII.3.4
45. Pārāma Tattvam.Ibid V.1.2.1
46. Pārāmatmā Brd. up.III.1.1
47. Sat Ch.up.VI.2.1.
48. Sve, up. VI. 8.

49. Gitā XV. 7; cf. Maitr. up. V. 2.

50. Gitā X. 7. etc; Praśna up. V. 4.

51. Katha up V. 12.

52. Brh. up. 3. 7. 3-22.

53. Kath. up. II. 23.

54. Rāmānuja's Vedārtha Samgraha. 6.

55. IX. 18.

56. See Rāmānuja's introduction to the Gitā Bhāṣya; also Śrī Bhāṣya I. 1. 1; for the six guṇas characteristic of the Pāhcarātra school, see our account of the Pāhcarātra infra. Rāmānuja borrowed them from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and quotes the latter extensively to that effect. He quotes Viṣṇu Purāṇa-I. 2. 10-14; I. 22-63; VI. 5. 72, 83, 87. In these quotations these qualities are repeated as many as three times.

57. IX. 2.

58. VII. 18.

59. See Kusumappa Loc. cit. pp. 21-25

60. Śrī Bhāṣya I. 1. 1. See the details about the attributes of God in K. D. Bhadrwaja—The Philosophy of Rāmānuja pp. 118 ff.


62. I. 1. 21 which refers to ch. up. 7. 1. 8

63. Vedārtha Samgraha 133, 135.

64. Śrī Bhāṣya I. 1. 21.

65. Vedārtha Samgraha 127, cf. 81, 128 ff., Introduction to the Gitā Bhāṣya. In all these Rāmānuja profusely quotes from the Scriptures for his support.


67. Śrī Bhāṣya I. 1. 1, I. 1. 9, I. 4. 26, 27 etc. Vedārtha Samgraha 680 etc.


69. Rāmānuja quotes Śrīveda X. 129. 7, Tait. S. II. 2. 10. 5, Mahān. up. I. 6, Subāla. up. 6, Sve. up. III. 8, Tait up. II. 1; Mahābh. XII. 5. 27; Viṣṇu Purāṇa. IV. 1. 84.

71. Vedārtha Samgraha 127, 128, 131 etc. Intro. to Gitā Bhāṣya. Rāmānuja quotes for his support Rgveda X.90.16; VII.110.13, Subāla up. 6, etc.


73. See my remarks infra, pp. 101 ff.

74. Indian philosophy Vol. 689–90.

75. 31.19; also Tait. Áry. III. 13.3.


77. Introduction to the Gitā Bhāṣya.

78. Śrī Bhāṣya I.3.1.


80. Śrī Bhāṣya II.1.9, cf. I.1.21 where Rāmānuja refers to the Mahābhārata for his support.


82. This is based on the Gitā IV 7–8–

83. This is based on the Viṣṇu Purāṇa—‘Subhāśraya Prakaraṇa’ III.6.47 ff.

84. 352.14.

85. 340.23

86. 335.29

87. 340.22; 352.4

88. एको हुतास्को वर्तमानम् समिप्स्त्ये एकः न नयैस्यस्तपससे न निरन्तरं।
    एको कथु अहुः न तत्सदैव लोकधार्मिकाच्य निर्विरोधः।
    पुरुस्वरूपं संस्कृतं निर्गुणपुरुषं अविलासितं। 352–9 ff.

89. 340–44.

90. 339.3, 340.28, 348.13, 352.13

91. 340.22, 335.30

92. 340.43.

93. 348.12, 340.42

94. 339.4; 340.69.
The doctrine of Vyuha (Vyuha = showing asunder) denotes peculiar process of creation, which while bringing the product into existence leaves the source of the product unaltered. (Kasmir Saivism, J.C. Chatterjee p. 59). It further indicates that out of the six attributes of Vasudeva which break up into two pairs of two attributes, each of the three Vyuhas emanate one by one. It also suggests that each one of the three Vyuhas, except the first emanates from the interior one like one flame proceeding from another flame. (Pâma Tantra I.2.21; Laksâmi Tantra V.21. See our Samhita account).

The origin of this doctrine may perhaps be found in the worship of Vasudeva and Samkarsana. Strictly speaking the Vyuhas are three only, but sometimes Vasudeva is also included and the number comes to four. These four subordinate manifestations of the Supreme Being may be compared with Prâjñâ, Virâta, Visva and Taijasa in the Advaita Vedânta.

All the four Vyuhas have not always been recognized in this cult. The Narâyaniya (349-57) says so and it is attested by the inscriptions. The Ghoṣandi (Epigraphical Indica XVI, p. 25) and the Vânâghâta (Archaeological Survey of Western India p 60, ff) inscriptions mention only two forms, Vasudeva and Samkarsana. This suggests that originally only two Vyuhas were recognized, and afterwards two more members of the family of Krsna, viz. his son and grand son, were deified. This might have been done either on the above mentioned analogy with the Advaita, or, as Schrader suggests, to bring the original non-brâhmanic Pânâcarâtra into agreement with the Veda and the famous saying of the Purusa suktâ (fourth stanza) about the four quarters of God (Schrader - Introduction to the Ahirbudhnya Samhitâ etc. 144-45). The employment of this genealogical series may either be due to enable the untutored people to grasp the idea of the rather difficult series of emanation of the Smâkhyâ system, or it may be a theologism created to give Vasudeva etc. a permanent place in the teachings and worship of the Pânâcarâtra community.

The doctrine of Vyuha does not occur in the Vedic literature, nor do we find it in the Gîta. The Gîta mentions as Prakrtis
of Vasudeva, five elements, mind, buddhi, egoism and jiva. (VII.465). But we do not find any evidence for R.G. Bhandarkar's conjecture that these elements were later on personified into Samkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha.

The Vyūha doctrine in its characteristic form does not occur in the Purāṇas as well. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the members of His family (chpt.V). They occur in the same way in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (chpt.X). But often in this Purāṇa the Deity is greeted as having four forms of Vasudeva, Samkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha; but what the Deity is, or does, under these forms is not elaborated except in one passage (IV.24 where Vasudeva is equated with Pāra, Samkarsana with Sukṣma, Pradyumna with buddhi and Aniruddha with manas) (cf. I.5, VI.16; X.40; XI.15; XII.11)

For Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's treatment of the Vyūha doctrine see my paper 'Does Badarayana favour Pāṇcarātra?' Philosophical Quarterly, April, 1965.
121. असिद्धान्तामात्रे निवेद्ये व्रि भावी सर्वेश्वरे प्रेमे।
सर्वि विभवगतः दीर्घाण्डः पुनःसङ्ग्रहः।

IV.83-86.

122. प्रयत्नस्यं भावावर्जनं भीमानं विश्रामी।
साताश्च मुद्दरिच्छाय प्रसन्नता सुगृहस्यं।

वस्तुनिष्ठवेषं ति विषय श्रीनामार्गः।

IV.88,89,92.

123. तद्भव विष्णुवानो विभवली अश्लिष्टविद्या।
युग्मव निविद्धकान्ति निर्माणानामो सत्य।
स्मार्तिन्यस्य मोच्यो शान्ति प्रचारः परार्यं।
तत् गुणमेव आकृत्रेक दिश्तुं परः।

प्रियतरुपः अनुत्तमश्चिमम् भलो शक्ति व ज्ञानः।

II.87-90 also 91 ff.

124. See the III chapter.

125. निर्भृत्यं निरीठ्यं च निविद्धमार्गं श्रीम्।

I.5.6.

126. 'अब्बंद्रायं न श्रितिमश्रवः।'

II.3.19.

127. एव एवेश्वर: २०व निर्विश्वातु मिरिवलेष्वुन।

II.1.22

128. प्रामादिकेष्वम विसंगतं सत्यं विविधव नारदः
भजन्यं परं श्रीलं सांग्षेष्व गुणावसर्गम्।

'भवचतुर्युप्रिति नामिनम्।'

II.2.100.

129. दर्शनां अवृयो तु दयान्ते मनोदश्यं
नूतन्ते अंगुला विवेकश्च नादः।

एकोर्यात्राः खष्टम्वेष्विभिः
स्त्रियविहिं क्रिक्षायन्ति श्रीलवविभिः।

II.67

130. कैलासस्याति ते ब्रजेन भवसे ५२स्यः
नास्तिक्षेत्राः ग्रंथितेष्व ग्रंथितेष्व एकोनितिः।

ीत्वेश्वरश्रीमानं वरुणिक विश्वेश्वरवातः।

131. See details in the chapter on cosmology.

132. Laksñmi Tantra—VI.25; II.27-35 (for Laksñmi)
Through nirgunah, she bears all these six gunas.

II.15.

133. II.15.


135. Ahirbudhnya III.2.

136. Laksñmi Tantra IV.1., Laksñmi Tantra II, 11.12,2. Ibid.III.14,
Ibid. III. 25. See XIV. I to 4 of which the translation is
given in the text cf. II. 22-23.

137. 'व्यापारस्तरस्यः देवस्य साधनसिद्धं न संशयः।
अर्थं किं तद्वर्त्य देवस्य संवृतं धम्म प्रियमात्माः॥'

Ibid II.67.

Ibid.II.29.
139. Ahirbudhnya VI.2.
140. Ibid VI.3.
142. Schrader P.30.
143. Visvaksena p.122-
144. See Schrader P. 25 for details.
146. Pādma Tantra I. 316 ff.
148. Visnua tilaka II. 29ff. See the forms, colours, ornaments and weapons of Para in Schrader. p. 52.
149. See footnote 73 supra.
150. See footnote 44 supra and infra-chapter on Cosmology.
151. II,27-35.
152. II,19
153. Laksma Tantra II.55.
154. Pādma Tantra I. 2.81 ff.
156. Visvaksena Samhita p.122.
157. This form is exhaustively treated in Visvaksena Samhitā. The major portion of the Samhitā literature concerns with the treatment of this topic.
166. C.I.6.3.5.
167. C.I.6.3.5.
168. Tirumalai 16.
169. * Through friendly days and nights, elects me to ever remain, To union wooing me, His own to make, nor let me 'lone'.
Quoted from DasGupta. Loc. cit. P.78.
170. See. C.Ž. Sharma. 'A critical Survey of Indian Philosophy.' p280.
172. Ibid P. 432 ff.
175. See Radhakrishnan 'Indian Philosophy' Vol II. pp.445-46.
176. तिविं आत्मात्मानीप्राप्ति परिपार्यं स्वभवितंसन्यो वारलं स्वसिद्धं शरणं गलं न कर्मयों मण्डल॥.1.14
179. C.Ž. Sharma-Indian Philosophy P. 524.
182. Two sources of Morality and Religion P.216.
184. See Indian Philosophy, Vol. II. p. 720-
185. Râmânuja’s VedârthaSangraha-Introduction p. 36.
S.B.E. Series vol. XXXIV. Introduction P.XXIII.
188. Loc. cit. p.193 N.
189. Ibid. p.185.
190. Ibid. p.193 N.
191- Ibid. p.22-25.
192. Ibid p. 185.
194. Ibid p. 186.
195. Vedārtha Samgraha, section 110, 11, 141, 142 etc.
196. loc. cit p. 183.
197. Ibid p. 190.
198. Ibid p. 23.
199. Ibid p. 22-25
201. Ibid p. 187-82.
203. Ibid p. 188, 322 ff; also Thibaut loc. cit. Introduction p. XXIII.
204. See my paper 'Does Bādarāyana favour Pāñcarātra'.
205. loc. cit. p. 311.
206. Ibid. p. 313.
207. Ibid. p. 313.
209. loc cit. p. 315.
211. This is contended by Prof. Kumarappa on p. 316.