Chapter 3

The ONE AND MANY
An important problem any religious system faces is to explain how God and man, i.e., the infinite and the finite self, are related to each other. The idea of the infinite (with its implication of oneness) and finite (with its implication of multiplicity) seem at first sight to be opposed to each other and a relationship appears to be impossible. But the ingenuity of any religious system consists in explaining this relationship. In fact, this issue is a fundamental one. How can a man, unless and otherwise knows that there is an infinite being and he, the finite self, is capable of being related to that being, depend on it? The knowledge of the infinite Self and the possibility of entering into a relationship with it is undoubtedly a necessary pre-requisite for the finite self in its spiritual journey. The efforts and the yearnings to understand this relationship is captured by Coleridge in the following poetic lamentation: “I would make a pilgrimage to the deserts of Arabia to find the man who can make me understand how the one can be many.”

In our country the scriptures which form the bedrock of the philosophical schools are not very clear in their expressions. The Upanisads are cryptic in form and the teachings ambiguous. The authors of those periods
in their zeal for compression use almost algebraic mode of expressions. So in understanding them we run into, as Hiriyanna points out, "great, almost insurmountable difficulties." Again the uncertainty in deciding what exactly is the teachings of Upanisads. Vedānta Sūtra gives rise to different interpretations and results in the emergence of different schools of Vedānta.

3.1 Aprthak-siddhi-sambandha

In explaining the relationship between the finite and the infinite Rāmānuja takes his clue from our ordinary language usage. In our ordinary usage of language we speak of two kinds of relations as known in the following statements:

i) Rama has a stick

ii) I am a man or Rose is red.

The relationship expressed in the first statement is of possessor-possessed kind and the two are separable. In the second set of statements the relationship is internal and the two are inseparable. The relationship which exists between a soul and its body or between a subject with
its attribute is of this kind and Ramanuja characterises such a relation as aprthak-siddhi-sambandha. To understand this unique concept, it should be compared and contrasted with the parallel concept, samavāya relation of Naiyāyikas.

For Naiyāyikas samavāya relation exists between two inseparable entities (ayuta-siddha). It implies that the separation of the two necessarily implies the destruction of at least one of them. To explain samavāya Naiyāyikas adopt the principle of svaparanirvāhaka. It means that it is capable of explaining itself as well as another thing (e.g. the term wife). Samavāya is a svaparanirvāhaka in the sense that it is a relation which could relate itself with the relata without the need of a third relation.

The Vedānta-Sūtra rejects this samavāya. According to Viśistādvaita substance and its attributes are inseparable by their very nature. An attribute cannot be separated from its substance; similarly a substance cannot be conceived without its attribute. And when an object is perceived, it is cognised as inherently connected with the quality. While the substance and its attributes are related to each other by virtue of their intrinsic char-
acter, to conceive a separate relation such as samavāya is superfluous.

For Naiyikas samavāya is a separate relation. It is regarded as one of the six independent padārthas. It is nitya, in the sense that it is not produced. It is between a dravya and guna. But aprthak-siddhi is not a separate relation. It is the svarūpa of relata. It is not permanent in all cases. If the relata are not permanent, such as rose and its redness, it is temporary. But in the case of a jīva and its dharmabhūta-jñāna, it is nitya. Aprthak-sthiti is not strictly a relation. It is only a name given to the inseparable character of the relata. This technical term was explained etymologically in Śrutaprakāśikā. The word aprthak means not separate. The word siddhi implies two things: sthiti (existence) and pratiti (cognition). Aprthak-sthiti means the two entities cannot exist separately. Similarly aprthak-pratiti signifies that the two entities cannot be comprehended separately. By definition aprthak-siddhi, as Hiriyanna paraphrased, "connotes that one of the two entities related is dependent upon the other in the sense that it cannot exist without the other also existing, and that it cannot be rightly known without the other also
being known at the same time.”

3.2 Viśeśaṇa-viśeṣya-sambandha

The conception of relationship as subject-attribute relation is important to the system. In criticising the Advaita view of substance as Pure Being, Rāmānuja concluded that any substance of which we know anything in experience is always characterised by differences, and against the Bhedābhedavādin, he asserts that these differences are real. The realm of everyday experience shows us that a thing holds together and supports real differences. Scriptures say that Brahman is One, and yet that He is the ground and the soul of many, which are different from Him in character. The finite self is an inseparable attribute of the infinite as its aprthak-siddhi-viśeṣaṇa. The viśeṣaṇa are many but the viśeṣya is one only.

This viśeṣaṇa-viśeṣya-sambandha can be deduced from the ontology of satkāryavāda. According to satkārya-vāda the causal substance passes or evolves into another mode of existence. In this process what we
find is that when an effect is produced by or originated from a cause a substance now characterised by a certain attribute, state or mode of existence assumes another attribute, state or mode of existence which it always held potentially within itself.

Rāmānuja also stresses the point that finite self stands in an attribute-relation to the infinite self by using the grammar rule sāmānādhikaranya. For he comments on Gītā as: “All things thus are predicative, or modes of Paramapuruṣa, hence Paramapuruṣa alone exists, adjectivated by everything else. All terms are thus connotations of Him by the rule of sāmānādhikaranya or the rule which expressed the inseparable relation existing between a substance and attribute or the invariable co-existence of subject and predicate.”

To the question can a substance become an attribute, Rāmānuja answers: “For, as genus (jāti) and quality so substance (dravya) also may occupy the position of determining attribute (viśeṣaṇa) in so far as they constitute the body of something else.” In relation to the infinite which is their meaning, they become inseparable and correlative factors and lose their independence and
exclusiveness. As P.N. Srinivasachari aptly puts it: “The plurality of cit and acit is accepted, but the pluralistic view is rejected.” What it means is this: considered in themselves cit and acit are indifferent, but when considered as parts of the infinite they are internally or organically related to each other. Rāmānuja illustrates this with the example of multi-coloured piece of cloth, where thread of each colour remains ever distinct. The material cause is like a thread of different colours, white, black, red, etc. But at a given point each is connected by a single colour, say, white. Here there is no confusion of loss of identity or characteristic. The Lord is the material cause of the sentient and non-sentient things, the different threads, are capable of existing apart from one another.

3.3 Śarīra-śarīrī-śambandha

The relation between the infinite and finite self is best brought out by the analogy of soul and the body it animates. The organismic relation, the śarīrā-śarīrī-śambandha, is most important and it has been rendered as the pradhāna pratitantra by the dialectician of the system, Vedānta Deśika. One of the present day Vaish-
navites says: “It is this central idea that serves as the fulcrum of the philosophy of Rāmānuja and it alone satisfies all the pramāṇas.”

Rāmānuja enters into a detailed analysis of what body (śarīra) means when he speaks of śarīra-śarīrīsambandha. Ordinarily the word śarīra is used to denote the physical structure of a living being. And in Śrūṭis we find that this world (both sentient and non-sentient) are said to constitute His body. So Rāmānuja aims at giving a definition of the word that is in agreement with the general use.

In defining the word śarīra, which will be applicable to all kinds of bodies that are described in the Śrūṭis and those which are referred to in our ordinary usage, Rāmānuja takes up the prevailing definitions and refutes them. The Naiyāyikas define body as that which is the seat or the abode of activity, sense organ, and experience in the form of pleasure and pain. This definition was not acceptable to Rāmānuja on three accounts, firstly, if the body is the seat of activity, even a pot becomes a śarīra insofar as it is the locus of some activity. Again a body in the state of swoon does not have any activity but it
still continues to be the body. The definition of body as the abode of sense organ is too narrow as it excludes such material entities which are regarded as bodies but do not have sense-organs, for e.g. the stones and woods constitute the body of the Lord according to Śrūtis. Thirdly, the definition that body is the basis for the experience of pleasure and pain is faulty, because such experiences belong to the soul and not to the physical body. And after this, he adopts the following satisfactory definition: “Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purposes, and which stands in an entirely sub-ordinate relation is the body of that soul.”

The assertion that finite self constitutes the body of the infinite raises some problems. First of all how is it possible to account for the imperfections of the body to a perfect infinite Self. Secondly, how can this sarīra-sarīrī-sambandha be understandable in a way that does not lead to the compromise of the perfection of the Infinite? In fact, Rāmānuja not only anticipated these objections, but he himself formulates them.

To the first objection Rāmānuja answers like this:
"While the highest self undergoes a change - all imperfections are limited to the sentient beings constituting part of its body, all change is restricted to the non-sentient things which constitute another part. The highest self is affected in that sense only that it is the ruling principle, and hence the self, of matter and souls in their gross or evolved state; but just on account of being this, viz., their inner ruler and self, it is in no way touched by their imperfections and changes."\textsuperscript{10}. Moreover Rāmānuja contends that since God's body is not a product of \textit{karma}, the sufferings of it cannot affect God. When Rāmānuja comments on the \textit{Vedānta-Śūtra} (11.1.14), he says that what necessitates sufferings is not the mere embodiedness but the same brought out by \textit{karma} either good or bad. Since God's body is not result of good or bad actions, the question of his sufferings and imperfections hardly arise.

To the second question Rāmānuja's solution is set forth in the following passage where he explains the process of modification: "The modification taught in our system is such as to introduce imperfections into the highest Brahman, on the contrary it confers on it limitless glory. For our teaching as to Brahman's modifications is
as follows: ... Now, when this world which forms Brahman's body has been gradually reabsorbed into Brahman, each constituent element being refunded into its immediate cause, so that in the end there remains only the highest subtle, elementary matter which scripture calls Darkness; and when this so called Darkness itself, by assuming a form so extremely subtle that it hardly deserves to be called something separate from Brahman, of which it constitutes the body, has become one with Brahman; then Brahman invested with this ultra-subtle body, forms the resolve, "May I again possess a world-body constituted by all sentient and non-sentient beings, distinguished by names and forms first as in the previous aeon, and modifies (parināmayati) itself by gradually evolving the world-body in inverse order in which reabsorption had taken place."¹¹

Vedānta Deśika amplifies the meaning of the sarīra-sarīrī-śambandha with the help of the following three expressions: a) ādharā-ādheya-śambandha, b) niyantar-niyamya-śambandha, and c) saṣa-sesi-śambandha.
3.4 Ādhāra-ādheya-sambandha

The metaphysical definition of Brahman as the absolute *sat* brings out the truth that Brahman is the ground of all that exists. He is the cause and effect of this universe. It implies the relationship ādhāra-ādheya-sambandha. The import of this relationship is that nothing can exist without the support of Brahman.

The metaphysical query: 'what is that by knowing which everything else is known?' is answered by the assertion that Brahman is the ground and the ādheya of the universe. This basic truth will be clear when we analyse that text *'satyam, jñānam, anantam Brahma (Taitt.)*. *Satyam* signifies that the infinite is the unconditional Reality. It is distinguished from finite self and defined as the *satyasya-satyam*. The term *jñānam* connotes eternally all pervasive character of His consciousness, it is the light of all lights (*jyotisam jyotis*). Brahman is *ananta* means it is the true infinite or the eternal of eternals. The finite selves draw their substantiality from it. It is their *svarūpārāya*. This idea is found in the *Gītā* also: “This is my lower *prakṛti*. But, O mighty armed one, know that my higher nature is another. It is
my life-principle (Jīva-bhūta), by which this universe is sustained."\textsuperscript{12} In Gītā the infinite is compared to womb: "The Great Brahman is my womb, in which I place the embryo and hence there is the origin of all beings." This is how Rāmānuja comments on this passage: "This last passage means that the womb of the world is the great Brahman, i.e. non-intelligent matter in its subtle, state, commonly referred to as prakṛti: with this I connect the embryo, i.e. the intelligent principle. From this contact of the non-intelligent and the intelligent due to my will there ensues the origination of all beings from Gods down to lifeless things."\textsuperscript{13}

3.5 Niyantr-niyāmya-sambandha

The metaphysical idea of Brahman as ādhāra can be interpreted in terms of Brahman as niyantr. The ontological view of Brahman as the real of the reals and the true of all that is true stresses the idea of divine immanence which pulsates through all beings and sustain their forms and functions.

The idea of niyantr brings out the idea of the eth-
ical eminence of Brahman and shows that the finite is not only rooted in the infinite (svarūpāsrita) but also controlled or directed by it (saṃkalpāsrita). The antaryāmīvidyā of the Vedānta-Sūtra makes it clear that the essential quality of the sarvatman, the all self, is the attribute of inner rulership (niyantṛta). In Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad we find this interesting conversation: 'Uddalaka questions: do you know that ruler who is the inner controller of all the universe? The immortal answer of Yajnavalkya is: That is Brahman who is immanent in all beings as their eternal ruler, having the quality of sarva-niyantṛtva.'¹⁴ Gītā speaks of Brahman as the controller of the universe like the one mounted over a machine which is run by Him.

The whole world is contained in Brahman and the world evolves from Him and He exists in it as its inner self, inner controller, immortal. Further Gītā ordains that the inner ruler or Paramātman is the subject of every moral judgement. Since Brahman is the inner ruler, he is the subject of all actions.

Now comes the question of moral freedom of jīva. If Brahman is the ultimate subject of all actions can jīva be
deemed to posses moral freedom? Rāmānuja solves this important problem by the doctrine of dātta svatantra or cowered freedom. ‘Lord’ says Sūtrakāra, ‘makes the souls act,’ i.e. He permits choice to jīva, thereby justifies the meaning of commands and prohibitions. When He gives the finite self permission/sanction (anumati) the desires and tendencies emerge as actions. So the moral responsibility accrues only to the finite self. Even though, through kartṛtvā (agency) finite self acquires the freedom of action the fructification of action is rested on the Upadraṣṭa (overseer), the infinite. The infinite in this context may be compared to a light which one may use for forging and another for reading scripture. The merit or demerit devolves entirely on the persons concerned, and not on the light.

Moral freedom and dependence seems incompatible at the first sight. Rāmānuja assures that there is no such incompatibility. It is well illustrated by the analogy of a joint owners of a property. If one of these wishes to transform that property to a third person he cannot do so without the permission of his partner, but that permission given after all is his own doing, and hence the fruit of action (reward or anything) properly belongs to him.
only. So it is an established conclusion of the school that Brahman in its immanent aspect is the inner controller of all without being tainted by their imperfection.

3.6 Śeṣa-śeṣi- sambandha

While adhe yatva brings out the truth of modal dependence, niyam yatva or the state of being ruled explains the idea of saṅkalpadhīna or dependence on the divine will. These two kinds of understanding of the relation leads to the third kind that the infinite and finite self stands in dependent upon-dependent relationship. The finite self metaphysically as well as morally depend upon the infinite Self. This relationship is also known as owner-owned relationship.

The īṣṭa-Īṣa-sambandha is the relation of the absolute dependence upon God and placing one’s humble service (kaiṅkarya) entirely at His disposal. The self belongs to God, exists for His satisfaction and surrenders itself to His redemptive mercy. The definition of the term īṣṭa is given in Pūrva-Mīmamsa Sūtra (3.1.1) as, ‘what subserves another is īṣṭa. Rāmānuja elaborates
this idea in *Vedārthasangraha* as: “that which is intended for the glorification and excellence of another is called a *sesa*, and the other which attains the excellence is called a *sesi*.” In this world our house, land, cloth, flowers etc. are used for our benefit and excellence. They do not exist for themselves. The house, land etc. are subservient objects (*sesa*) and we are their *sesi*. Likewise the finite self is the *sesa* and the infinite is the *sesi*.

The transition from the spiritual consciousness of finite self to the religious consciousness of *Paramātman* or this *sarva-seṣin* is a revolution in life from the geocentric to the theocentric. The motive of conduct is shifted from the self to its inner self and every *karman* is consecrated as *kaiṇḍkarya*. The self gains its freedom to dedicate it to ātman who is essentially free and self-dependent. In this way the *sesa-sesi-sambandha* is transformed and deepened into *dāsa-svāmin-sambandha* or servant and master relationship. The relationship of *sesa-sesi* culminates in the special relationship of *svāmin* and *dāsa*. The speciality or peculiarity or distinctive nature of this relationship is that it is possible only between the infinite and finite self. The term *dāsa* or servant is applicable on-
ly to finite self. Dāsyatva or the idea of being a servant of God is thus a jīva conscious of the dependence of it on Īśvara and His redemptive purpose. When it realises its dependence, its ahamkara is destroyed and ‘I’ is offered to its inner ruler as svāmin. So this unique differentia of the system, dāsa-svāmin brought out the truth that selfhood has its true meaning and culmination only in consecrated service to the Lord. Bhāgavat-kairıkārya or service to God implies service to all jīvas.

3.7 Raṣaka-raķṣya-sambandha

The sarīra-sarīri-sambandha conveys the metaphysical, ethical and logical relationships, viz. adhara - adheya-sambandha, niyantr - niyāmya-sambandha and seṣa-ṣeṣi-sambandha respectively. The religious significance of the relationship is brought to forth by raķṣaka-raķṣya-sambandha. When Rāmānuja begins his Śrī Bhāṣya in the very first prayer poem itself, he refers to God’s promise of redemption of souls (Raķṣaika dikśhe). The protection that God offers to the jīv takes also the form of a promise rescuing the jīva from the sense of fear. Rāmānuja describes Him as the aśita-vātsalya-vivash - one who is overwhelmed by His vātsalya (tender
and protective love) for the devotee who is absolutely dependent on him (jīva). The term vātsalya, therefore means that the self-forgetting protective love that a cow shows towards its new born calf. God's determination covers everybody under the sky. As the Gītā says, "I am disposed equally towards all creatures, there is not anyone specially hateful, and specially beloved, to me."  

The implication of the ethical relationship is that God is the karma-phala-datr. Since, he apportions pleasure and pain in exact proportion to the moral worthiness of the kartṛ or doer. This makes Īśvara a stern ruler and mukti a distant goal to the aspirant. Therefore this legal conception should be reinterpreted by the redemptive love of kṛpā only transforms the niyantṛ into rakṣaka. The rakṣaka-rakṣya-sambandha turns daṇḍana that befalls on man is spoken by an English poet as "the shadow of the hand of God stretched out caressingly."  

Daṇḍana is dayā-kārya or the work of compassion. Punishment is the inflow of kṛpā or divine grace. Forgiveness does not cancel karma, but it transforms it by the organic blending of goodness and mercy. The super-natural realm of kṛpā and the moral realm of karma is reconciled or bridged by the view that forgiveness is the foundation of
he moral law.

From the *rakṣaka-rakṣya-sambandha*, even *pralaya* and *sṛṣṭi* are merely expression of the divine will to redeem all beings. When the universe is steeped in sin and sensuality, the Lord in His infinite mercy suspends for a while the cosmic process and thus deprives the self its instruments of evil, this is *pralaya*. *Sṛṣṭi* is also a redemptive process in which “the *jīva* wakes up to moral activity, enters on a new life, and is given a fresh opportunity to pursue the path of duty and ascend to the world of grace.”¹⁸

Rāmānuja points out two characteristics of the Lord as the redeemer of souls. The *saubhāya* or easy accessibility and *sauśilīya* or graciousness. *Saubhāya* is the quality of becoming visible in divine form and it is exercised in favour of persons who long to see him. In *Gītā*, three fold aim is mentioned for the incarnation of God then and there, whenever necessary. The objects are a) the protection of the good, b) destruction of the wicked, and c) establishment of *dharma*.¹⁹ How God steps down from His abode and showers his *kīrpa* was compared by Rāmānuja in his parable of the King’s son being restored
to his father.

3.8 The Admired and the Admirer

Beauty is destroyed by intellectualising it. Though beauty is alogical it can be analysed and rendered articulate. Beauty is more attractive than truth and goodness. Viśiṣṭādvaita is the only Indian religious system that gives an important place to beauty (saundaryā) in its metaphysical as well as eschatology.

Viśiṣṭādvaita subscribes to the view that saundaryā is closely connected with the idea of ānanda. T.P. Ramachandran contented that ‘to describe Brahman as bliss is as good as describing Brahman by the term beauty (saundaryā). The difference is that ‘bliss’ takes the point of view of experience and ‘beauty’ takes the point of view of what is experienced - the subjective and the objective points of view. 20

The view of absolute beauty is finally transformed into an enchanting vision. Ugliness is the result of finite self being soiled by sensuality but when self is released
from its dross, it realises itself as the embodiment of divine beauty. But, to a spiritual aspirant, who seeks the intimacy of communion, the ontological Beyond, the ethically Perfect have no value of attraction. It is aesthetics that mediates between metaphysics and ethics, and brings down heaven to the earth, and elevates the earth to heaven. Aesthetics is midway between sensuousness and spirituality and bridges the gulf between the infinite and the finite. In the Scripture Brahman is described as ultimately the only object of love. That it is an object of love. This implies the presence of beauty in Brahman for what is lovable must be lovely. And that loveliness must be of the perfect kind - quite unlike the lovable aspect of common world, which admits of comparison. The mundane beauty of manmatha or eros that soils the jīva is conquered by the supramundane beauty of Bhuvana-sundara, which means, ‘he whose beauty is the order of the universe, ‘or’ to whom the cosmic order belongs as the beauty,’ who transforms and transcends eros. That is why the infinite is known as the manmatha-manmatha or madana-mohana.21

This Bhuvana-sundara leads the finite self to eternal bliss. That is the reason why Rāmānuja is insisting on
the primacy of aesthetic consciousness and regarding the cosmic process as the spontaneous creative expression of Brahman as the divine artist.

Only when one comes to know this relationship and the infinite as the Bhuvana-sundara will he sublimate his emotions, fear, anger, wonder and sex and spiritualise them. Only then the sensual content will be removed and can be directed towards infinite. The Bhāgavata declares that those who with devotion direct their sexual passion or karma, hatred or krodha, fear or bhaya, feeling of friendship or sneha, feeling of comradship or aikya and love or bhakti or sauhṛda ceaselessly to Hari, become one with him and attain His likeness or tanmayata, when one is capable of doing this Brahmajñāna turns into Brahmarasa and at last finite self attains Brahmānanda.

It may be noted that Viśiṣṭadvaita gathers up the conclusion reached in metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and presents them in their true perspective by its own distinctive theory of God as Brahman and the universe as the sarva (all). The relation of body and soul hormonizes the relations.