

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

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The key-stone of the whole structure of the Gītā is its spirit of harmonization. Catholicity of outlook is its characteristic genius. Its teaching embraces myriad facets of Truth concerning Man, Nature and God. Paying due attention to the various parallel doctrines that prevailed at the time of its composition, the Gītā integrates them into its own teaching so as to evolve a harmonious scheme of achieving spiritual perfection. The teaching of the Gītā cannot be confined to a particular 'system' such as advaita, dvaita or viśiṣṭādvaita. Thus the present study, as we have seen so far, has neither been a vindication of Rāmānuja's interpretations, nor an adjudgement of the merit of rival interpretations. It is more an exercise in understanding the argument of the poem vis-a-vis the doctrines of Viśiṣṭādvaita, and in noting the positive contribution of Rāmānuja to the general understanding of the Gītā.

A resume of the essentials of the argument of the Gītā as interpreted by Rāmānuja may be provided here: The first chapter and the opening verses in the second chapter provide the setting for the spiritual discourse of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Emphasising the contrast between the permanent Self and the perishable body, the second chapter portrays the immortality and the immutability of the Individual Self.

Understanding the true nature of the Self is set as the immediate goal propaedeutic to the final goal of God-realization. Karmayoga and jñānayoga are prescribed as the means of understanding the true nature of the Self and they are delineated. The features and the mode of life of a steady-minded contemplative in the final stage of self-realization are depicted in detail. The relative efficacy of karmayoga and its supremacy over jñānayoga in achieving self-realization is described in the third chapter. The fourth chapter emphasises the importance of jñāna as the component of karmayoga, that provides the basis and supplies the method of performing actions. The nature and purpose of avatāra as an affirmation of the Divine involvement in shaping the destiny of mankind come to be described by way of an important digression in the beginning of the fourth chapter. Scanning karmayoga in all its dimensions, its merits as the felicitous means of ātmaprāpti are exposed further in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter describes the mode of meditation, which culminates in attaining to 'yoga' which is the final fruit of karmayoga and jñānayoga. Effecting a happy correlation between what is enshrined in BG II.55-58 and that in BG VI. 29-32, Rāmānuja identifies four successive stages of development in yoga.

The seventh chapter takes up the delineation of the nature of the Supreme Reality. How the Reality is

obscured by Māyā, the wonderful Veil constituted by the three guna-s and how one can get free from its clutches only by resorting to God are also dealt with here. The types of devotees of God and the supremacy of the devotion of the jñānin, the knower of Reality, are also delineated. The eighth chapter furnishes certain useful informations for sādhana describing different modes of meditation for different classes of seekers in accordance with the different goals sought by them, viz. aiśvarya, kaivalya and bhagavatprāpti. The ninth chapter points to the metaphysical transcendence of the Lord and provides a powerful sketch of bhaktiyoga. The tenth chapter brings out the glory and the majesty of God as the Highest Reality, the only substantive principle of the entire Existence. The eleventh chapter provides a glimpse of the All-encompassing Viśvarūpa of the Lord and declares that bhakti is the only means to obtain a vision of Divine Majesty. The twelfth chapter brings out the felicity and swiftness of bhaktiyoga in achieving God-realization as compared with the laborious and the circuitous way of Self-realization by way of meditation on the aksara. Recognising different levels of bhaktiyoga in accordance with the individual capabilities of different aspirants, it prescribes alternative modes of worship at different levels of attainment.

A thorough reconsideration of the mutability of the

body and physical Matter on the one hand and the immutable nature of the Individual Self on the other is taken up in the thirteenth chapter. Explaining how the pure and unsullied Self acquires a mock nature in conjunction with Matter, it identifies certain spiritual virtues and furnishes the wisdom that enables the embodied Self to realize its true nature. At the outset of this chapter, Rāmanuja outlines the fundamentals of his philosophical position and demonstrates that his stand is justified by the principles of integration, synthesis and harmony of the various facets of Truth. The modes of bondage by the three guna-s is explained in the fourteenth chapter and the ways of getting released from the bondage is suggested. The fifteenth chapter declares the exalted supremacy of God as the Purusottama, transcending and supporting Matter and the Individual Selves in their bound and released states. The sixteenth chapter speaks about the two divisions in creation, viz. the divine and the demoniacal, as relating respectively to those who are obedient to the scriptures and those who are opposed to it. The futility of the undertakings not prescribed in the scriptures is pointed out in the seventeenth chapter. What is prescribed in the scriptures is classified into three categories according to the three gunas, and certain typical marks of scriptural prescriptions are pointed out in this chapter. The eighteenth chapter serves as a fitting conclusion of the whole book. It identifies tyāga and

sannyāsa as one and the same after a careful scrutiny of both the terms. It ascribes the ultimate agency of all actions to the Supreme Lord. Describing the several modes of manifestation of the three guna-s in our moral life, it recommends the development of sattvaguna for a mumukṣu. It recapitulates by way of a concluding resume, the scheme of spiritual development taught in the work, the ascent from karmayoga to jñānayoga and from jñānayoga to bhaktiyoga. It declares parābhakti as the immediate means of God-attainment. Drawing out attention to the inexorable designs of the Lord of the Universe who is also the indwelling Master seated in the hearts of every being in the Universe, it concludes with a clarion call to offer our everything unto Him and resort to Him as the sole means of upliftment and deliverance.

Rāmaṇuja construes many of the passages in the Gītā in an original light.¹ Employing strings of set compounds and familiar phrases, while commenting on those

1. Important instances may be cited here:

I.10; II.16,41,46,55-72; III.8,14-16,35; IV.5-11,17,33-38; V.10; VI.24,47, VII.15,16,24,28-30; VIII.3-22; IX.4-6,11,16-18,29; X.19-42; XI.7,13,15,40; XII.1-12; XIII.1-6,12,15,16,30; XIV.27; XV.16-18,20-22; XVIII.4,47-50, 54-56, and 66.

passages of the Gītā which are particularly favourable to Viśiṣṭādvaita,¹ he very often reminds us of the author of Śrībhāṣya and Vedārtha-saṅgraha. There are places where he is able to elicit important points from seemingly simple verses.² There are instances where we find the lighter side of his secular knowledge and the knowledge of physical sciences of his times at display.³ His explanations of certain individual words are noteworthy.^{3a} Ingenuity in terms of making a passage for an idea more intelligible can be noticed in certain places.⁴ Though he follows the same text as the one followed by Śaṅkara, here and there are few textual variations.⁵

1. II.11-12,27, III.30, IV.5-8; V.29; VI.47; VII.4-7, 8-14; VIII.14-16,22; IX.2-10,17-19,22-34; X.8-12,20,41; XI.40,43,53-54; XIII.19-23,33. XIV.3-4,27; XV.15-18; XVIII.46-48,54-66.
2. II,27; IV.5,14; V.16; VII.21; VIII.21; X.3; XIII.16 & 17, 33
3. II.17,23-24,31; III.12 (where He offers a definition of couryam) VI.9 &c.
- 3a. दृषीकेन (in I.25), अप्रमेय (in II.18), अधम् (in III.13), अध्यायुः (in III.16), अहङ्कार (in III.27), अक्षेतः (in III.32), साध्वः (in IV.8), वर्त्म (in IV.11) चातुर्वर्ण्यम् (in IV.3) (See p. 405)
4. II.19,22; X.9; XI.7,19,23,26,33,34 & 36.
5. योगी in X.17 प्रपद्येत in XV.4, अमादिमत्परं in XIII.12,

The Gīta is the voice of the Supreme Lord according to Rāmanuja.¹ It is an adhyātma-śāstra, a spiritual treatise.² Rāmanuja highlights the nobility and the spiritual urge in Arjuna, the pupil who was chosen worthy of spiritual instructions at the hands of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He probes into the depth of the psychological crisis of Arjuna and clarifies how a thorough spiritual rehabilitation was essential for him to rise up to the occasion. It is spirituality alone that can set the individual on the right perspective in all his activities in different facets of life. Rāmanuja emphasises that the secular functions of an individual are never opposed to his spiritual interests.³ Every action of man can contribute to his spiritual welfare in a spiritually well-informed life. Mokṣa is indeed the ultimate aim, the paramapurusaṛtha. But the other purusaṛtha-s are not opposed to Mokṣa.

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श्रद्धा (IV.40 and other places), विमुः (V.15), सङ्कल्प (VI.2), छिन्नाम्रः (VI.38), मनुष्याः (VII.3), बुद्धाराः (VII.18), प्रत्यक्षावगमम् (IX.2), शत्रिसूर्येवम् (XI.19), सव्यसाकिम् (XI.33). Similar instances can be seen in XIV.8, 12; XVI.1-4; XVII.18 also.

1. See V.D's comment on 'मग्वदुक्तात्ममेदः स्वभाविकमिति श्रुतिरप्याह' (RGB II-12); 'अपिज्ञब्दः प्रमाणद्वयसमुच्चये । श्रौत-वदेव प्रमाणान्तरनेरपेक्ष्यं सूच्यते । श्रुतिरपि नित्या तदाज्ञारूपतयेव हि प्रमाणम् ॥
2. RGB.II. -8-9.
3. RGB.II.9, 11, 13-15, 31, 38, 47, 72, III.30, IV.3, XI.32-34, XVIII.6

The very nature of the problem that brought the teachings of the Gītā into being presupposes that the nature of Reality should be such that it should support the possibility of ethical discrimination. Ethical discrimination is possible only when the freedom of will on the part of man as a self-conscious individual is a fact. Thus if the ethical teachings of the Gītā are to be held valid, the metaphysics of the Gītā that supports its ethical teachings must uphold a theory of the universe that is realistic.

An interpretation of the Gītā that places the validity of the ethical judgements of man on the same plane of Reality as that of the metaphysics which forms the basis of such a judgement is the most dependable guide to the teachings of the Gītā. Rāmaṇuja's contribution is precisely to be adjudged on this count. Effecting a significant deviation from the earlier interpretation of Śaṅkara, he upholds the reality of the world and the Individual Self. He maintains that God, the Supreme spiritual Being, the first principle of the Universe, and the metaphysical highest, is the central Reality in the Gītā. The description of the Individual Self or the puruṣa as a passive principle and the Nature or Prakṛti as being dynamic in the Gītā, points out Rāmaṇuja, is well understood in the light of the dependence of both of them to the Supreme Being as its parā-prakṛti and aparā-prakṛti. Ascribing activity to prakṛti alone leads to

materialism, while ascribing absolute passivity to purusa renders any spiritual quest unnecessary and impossible. The dualism between the prakṛti and the purusa of the Sāṅkhya-s is resolved in the Gītā in which the Puruṣottama comes to impart value and meaning to the existence of both.

Rāmanuja brings out the contrast between the Individual Self and Prakṛti with an added emphasis. Wrong identification of the Self with what is not-self is the basis of all Evil on the part of an individual. Wrong identity leads to the pursuit of wrong values which further enchains the Self in samsāra. Such wrong identification is due to the abuse of free-will enjoyed by the Self, ^{which is the} ~~being~~ gift of God. Freedom of will on the part of an individual is a metaphysical fact. The individual alone is responsible for his moral judgements. Nature is real. Māyā, the instrument of bondage, is nothing but the wonderful fecundity of Nature. An embodied being can choose to be led away by the promptings of prakṛti, leading a life of sujagation to senses, or can lead a life of willing submission to God. In the latter case, prakṛti ceases to be a binding factor, and comes to be regarded as the vibhūti of God, which can be utilized as an instrument for salvation.

Puruṣottama of the Gītā and the Brahman of the Upaniṣads are one and the same. Creation and dissolution of the Universe proceed from Him. Creation and dissolution are not to be understood in an absolute sense in this context.

Both puruṣa and prakṛti are anādi or ever-existent. Manifestation of the world is creation and its withdrawal into a state of subtle possibility is destruction. The words sattva and asattva also receive an interpretation on similar lines by Rāmānuja.

God is the Moral guardian of the Universe. He regulates and controls the Universe. Rāmānuja expounds the theological settings of the Gītā with great competence. Rāmānuja's Gītābhāṣya is a typical work of its kind in this respect. It demonstrates how theology can provide content to metaphysics. The oft-raised problem, whether Brahman is placed above Īśvara or Īśvara is placed above Brahman in the Gītā finds no basis following the lines of interpretation of Rāmānuja.

Utilizing each and every hint provided in the text, Rāmānuja works out his bhāṣya into a powerful vindication of his favourite concept śarīra-śarīri-bhāva. He integrates every form of relation between the God and the Universe taught in the Gītā into the ruling concept of śarīraśarīribhāva.¹ The transcendent-yet-immanent mode of existence of the Supreme Being, the doctrine of the world and the Selves forming an aṃsa of the Lord, and the concept of vibhūti receive well-defined and substantial interpreta-

 1. RGB. III.II, 30-32, VII.4.13, 18; IX.4-6, 15, 23;
 X.20-42; XI.7, 13-18.

tion at the hands of Rāmanuja and they all get integrated together and go to delineate the different dimensions of śarīraśarīribhāva.

Since Rāmanuja finds no dichotomy of the world of appearance ^{and} the absolute Reality, the practical side of philosophy in the Gītā enjoys as much attention and importance as the metaphysical doctrines of the poem enjoy in his commentary. The life of a mumukṣu is a sweet sojourn in the līlavibhūti of the Lord, while his final destination is his permanent abode in the nityavibhūti of the Lord. The one sovereign attitude that renders the life of an individual into a well-integrated and a smooth pilgrimage towards perfection is characterised by bhakti. Bhakti is the main thrust of the poem as a whole. Bhakti is love of God, the ultimate limit of spiritual perfection, ~~and~~ the abode of absolute bliss. It is the love that issues from a precise knowledge of Reality. Knowledge of Reality and love of God fuse together into bhakti, since the highest Reality is nothing but God. Vedana, dhyāna, upāsana and dhruvā smṛti are the several means employed by the Upaniṣads to attain the Supreme, but they all connote one and the same means, and that is bhakti. Rāmanuja works out a magnificent doctrine of bhakti, discussing and delineating many of its aspects. His understanding of the concept of bhakti does full justice to Gītā as a treatise of aikāntikabhakti.¹

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1. cf: Ranade op.cit. p. 101.

His interpretation of the ninth chapter of the Gītā throws a flood of light on many of the aspects of bhakti in visiṣṭādvaita.

Karmayoga and jñānayoga are the two independent paths leading to the understanding of the true nature of the Self of the form of immediate intuitive perception of the Self. He upholds the cause of karmayoga as the superior way between the two. Karmayoga is the natural and easier way within the reach of all embodied beings, subject to the promptings of Matter as they are. He develops karmayoga into a comprehensive scheme aiming at Self-realization which includes the merits of jñānayoga as well. He denounces the view that the Gītā teaches the renunciation of action.

It is significant to note that Rāmānuja never disparages the value of jñānayoga as an independent means of Self-realization. He admits its theoretical validity, but advises against it considering the practical hurdles it entails in the light of the inexorable ways of the influence of the three guṇa-s of prakṛti. Rāmānuja emphasises this fact in quite unmistakable terms. Certain misconceptions about the role of jñāna and karma in Rāmānuja's philosophy may be corrected in this light. Thus for instance, the remark of Van Buitenen¹ that "the exact relation between

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1. op.cit. p.20.

karmayoga and jnanayoga is not altogether clear", or the observation of Lad¹ that "Rāmānuja is a staunch advocate of karma-jñāna samuccaya", are required to be corrected in the light of the present study. Again, with regard to the opinion of Rāmānuja on 'jīvanmukti', his Gītābhāṣya throws a brighter light. He is not much against what the ideal of jīvanmukti stands for. His criticism of the ideal of jīvanmukti in Advaita is directed against pointing out the untenability of the continuation or persistence of an illusion even after the attainment of the 'knowledge' that should completely destroy the illusion. In his Gītābhāṣya, however, (V. 19 & 28) he declares in very clear terms that a person who 'has got rid of desire, fear and anger, who has set mokṣa as his sole objective, and is intent on the vision of the Self, is indeed a liberated person even in the stage of sādhana, as he would be in the stage of sādhyā.'²

'Yoga' is a word which is understood in different sense in different contexts. When yoga stands for the technique of the practice of meditation, Rāmānuja takes the help of the celebrated texts on yoga. His identification of four successive stages of development of sthitaprajña

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1. A.K. Lad, A Comparative study of the Concept of liberation in Indian Philosophy, Burhampur, 1967, p.144.
2. विगतेच्छामयक्रोधः मोक्षपरायणः मुनिः आत्मावलोकनशीलः
यस्सदा मुक्तः अक्षयः - साध्यदज्ञायामिन्न साधनदज्ञायामपि मुक्तः
अत्र स जित्यर्थः । - RGB.V.28.

(BG.II.55-58) in correlation with the four stages of yoga in the sixth chapter (29-32) stands out as a distinct interpretation. As Robert C. Lester who has contributed an independent book 'Rāmanuja on yoga' writes, "He draws significantly on Patañjali's Yoga but takes, as it is, only what is useful and discards or radically redefines the rest; further, he is most cautious about those aspects of yogic discipline which he accepts as they are defined by Patañjali. He considers that the primary pitfall in Yoga is at the very beginning where one is attempting to control the inner and outer organs. He guards against this pitfall primarily by prescribing Karmayoga and by the taking of the Supreme Person only as the object of dhāraṇā. There is no chance of going astray beyond dhāraṇā, when one has seen the ātman as śeṣa, he inevitably proceeds to meditation on the śeṣin." ¹

The theistic bent of the Gītā naturally favours the viśiṣṭādvaitic notion the summum bonum of existence. "Equivalence with God (sādharmya) and not identity (sāyujya) is emphasised." ² Following the foot-prints of Yāmuna Rāmanuja finds aiśvarya, kaivalya and Bhagavatprāpti as the three distinctly recognised goals of life, each surpassing the next in its worthiness of attainment. Strict adherence

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1. op.cit. p.141.

2. S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgītā, p.76.

to Yāmuna's guidelines has imposed certain restrictions on Rāmānuja's exegesis of the text, it should be said, and one feels that Rāmānuja's interpretation of the eighth chapter may be quoted as an instance in this regard. Identification of three modes of meditations based on the groups of aspirants appears rather forced. His utilization of Ch.Up.4.15.6, 5.9.1, 5.10.1 and 5.10.7 makes his interpretation of the eighth chapter rather involved. As Buitenen observes, "we may safely say that here the Gītā has done more to corroborate the śruti than contrariwise."¹

Apart from his adherence to the guidelines of Yāmuna and the principle of aikārya which render Rāmānuja's interpretations rather involved and sometimes far-fetched, we find many instances where his own self-imposed restriction has forced him to do so. He is punctilious in adhering to the demands of the context. What is generally a virtue poses certain times as an impassable imposition. Even so, it should be said that he has succeeded in maintaining the internal consistency of the text. He utilizes the theological and the religious tenets of the milieu in which he lived to understand the message consistently upheld by the Gītā as a whole: God is the metaphysical highest. He is the Supreme spiritual Being, from whom the evolution and the involution of the Universe proceed. What proceeds from

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1. op.cit. p.32.

the Supreme is not illusory. The world is real though impermanent in its manifested state, and the individuality of the finite spirit is a fact. Equality and the Divinity of the Individual Selves are equally true. The entire course of life of an embodied spirit as a self-conscious Individual is to be directed towards the realization of its Divine nature and all its actions are to be governed by this Ideal. Realization of the true nature of the Self naturally releases the Self to find its permanent abode and realize the supreme bliss of God-communion. Thus the attainment of God through Self-realization is the foundation of the entire ethical doctrine of the Gītā. God-realization through Self-realization is the central thread that runs through all the chapters. Bhakti or the 'intellectual love' of God is the single means emphasised throughout the text to achieve the End. Just as the uncompromising non-differentiation of Reality is the forte of Saṅkara, for which he is admired by his followers and criticized by others, an unflinching and an all-embracing love of God is the heart of Rāmanuja for which he is admired and criticized as well.

