



BHAKTI AS AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE IN INDIAN CULTURE

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Bhaktiyoga is the approach of love to a personal God. Its basis is faith (sraddha) and the response with which it meets is grace (Prasada). This being so, it is evident that bhakti can only manifest itself in man when God is conceived of as personal, a saviour (Rakshaka) worthy of trust and love and ready to be gracious. The deep and passionate devotion that appears in Gita is absent in the earlier literature. The nearest approach to the idea of Bhakti in the Upanishads is found in the conception of Upasana.

The Bhagavat Gita clearly sets forth the idea of Avatara. It is not, then surprising to note that Gita develops the doctrine of Bhaktiyoga which presents to the worshipper with a visible object of devotion and taught the value of pure, disinterested love in the religious life. The Gita conception of Bhakti is more pure and true than that of the Puranas, which allow the doctrine to degenerate, and which has been incorporated in the Vaisnava sects. Secondly, the Bhakti of the Gita is no unreasoned ecstasy, the object of devotion in the Gita is a personal God, (Krishna, Vasudeva, Narayana) who is worthy of love and adoration.¹ The faith of every man accords with his essential character; man is instinct with faith, as is his faith, so verily is he. The worship of Krishna could only have an ennobling effect upon his bhakta. Contrast with such a person, observes Hill, the amorous profligate of the Puranas, the Radha – lover of the Caitanyas²

Divorced from the duties of practical life and the dictates of common-sense. Bhakti, according to Gita, is but one essential element in a religious attitude where knowledge and action play their due part. It is recognized in the Gita that no true religion could ignore emotion and that no emotion should isolate itself from the functions of reason and will. It seeks to advocate a type of reasoned bhakti than emotionalism because no doctrine degenerates so rapidly as a doctrine of emotion. Thirdly, the bhakti doctrine of the Gita is perfectly simple. The later commentators elaborate this. For example Sridhara mentions eighty-one minor forms of bhakti. In his final highest and most mysterious message Krishna tells Arjuna that just as he expects his loyal devotees to love Him, so does he love them in return.

THE GITA DOCTRINE OF BHAKTI, YAJNA AND LIBERATION:

The word Bhakti means a variety of things. But in Gita it means devotion and loyalty to the personal God (Krishna) trust in Him and love of Him. It also means God's love for man. One should know that devotion to God is not only one of the



means that will lead to the vision of the self which is also liberation, but that this devotion and love, now raised to a higher power, gives content and purpose to liberation itself. There is a lower and a higher Bhakti.³ The first one is little more than conventional piety directed to God, the other is the completion and fruition that the self enjoys after its final emancipation from the bonds of the phenomenal world.

MEANING OF BHAKTI :

Bhakti in its initial stages means both trustful faith and love; and God rewards by bringing his devotee near to Him. "In whatsoever way men approach me, in that same way do I return their love"⁴. Here 'prapad' means not only to approach but also to be utterly devoted to some-body. Unlike bhakti is an emotional attitude that is only possible from an inferior to a superior. This humble devotion is rewarded by God. In the Gita Bhakti or loving devotion and communion with God or the divine transcends the 'fixed still state of Brahman' (Brahmishthiti)⁵ The question whether the individual soul subsists in God or not is here transcended because Bhakti introduces a new dimension. Love means giving, sharing, participation, total self giving and total interpretation, and so God abides in his lovers and them in God. In Bhakti there is a complete and personal indwelling of God. Sankara says here that God remains the same always. Like a fire God warms those who draw near to Him, but those far away must remain in cold. Bhakti is the natural culmination of any mystical theory which makes room for the many as well as the one.

Unlike the Vedic religious practices Bhakti is open to all. Pure men, good men, learned men who know devoted love are nearer to God. By devotion one should understand to set the mind on God, to do service to God, to prostrate to God, and one should bent upon God. ⁶Bhakti means to fix one's own thoughts on God. God, here, is an object of contemplation. This follows the classical Yoga tradition which suggests meditation (Dhyana) on God. Following the Yogic tradition the Gita prescribes meditation as a surest way of attaining liberation. We shall give a brief account of this.

MEDITATION IS A PART OF BHAKTI :

In the first place, the Gita suggests that an aspirant should put aside all the desires that press upon the mind and should feel to contend in self alone.⁷ Desires should be set aside because desires are the active manifestations of the evil. They force us to do evil against our will. One should not have any longing for pleasures. Passion, fear, wrath must flee away. The aspirant should not love anything nor hate anything. Love understood as Sneha is as much to be rejected as hate. Love, like Karma itself, is a snare (pasa).

The technique of concentration, which Gita initially introduces,⁸ is not to love God or to venerate Him but to concentrate (Ekagra) upon God. This is essentially the technique of Samkhyayoga systems of philosophy. Here the technique is in three stages. First, the body must be brought under control; second, the repetition of the sacred formula becomes present to the mind; and third by concentration on God one



becomes like Him (Mukta). Here no claims are made to devotion. Indeed, when it comes to the practice of contemplation. When it comes to the practice of contemplation, it matters little whether the yogin concentrates on the God or whether he selects whatever God he prefers as the object of meditation. The final aim of the yogin is isolation or detachment. This detachment is not only from material stuff but also from mental stuff.

The aspirant should not think of the objects of sense. If he thinks he is attached to them and from this attachment springs desire and from desire is anger born.⁹ Anger leads to bewilderment. From bewilderment the mind gets destroyed and from this follows the destruction of intellect and will. Ragadvesa or passion and design and Moha or delusion, bewilderment or Sammoha must be denounced. And to the man who denounces all these to him all Sorrows disappear and his soul stands firm.

Bhavana plays an important role here. Translations of the word 'Bhavana' have varied among modern commentators. According to Telang Bhavana means 'Perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge'¹⁰ Barnett says it is 'inspiration'¹¹. According to Rangacarya it is 'conceptual ideation'. Hill says it is reflection. Radha-krishnan calls it as power of concentration. Edgerton says it is efficient force. Senses rare hither and thither and when the mind is not controlled, it sweeps away the wisdom of a man, just as the wind sweeps away a ship on the water. According to the Samkhyakarika manas or mind is 'samkalpakam', i.e., imagination or conception or determination. The principal job of the mind is to control the senses.¹² "Let him restrain in every way by mind alone the senses" – says Gita.¹³ We must make a distinction here between Manas and Buddhi. Being classified with the senses manas naturally looks in their direction, whereas Buddhi naturally looks towards the self. Hence if it is to fulfil its proper function of restraining the senses, it must itself be held in check¹⁴ so that it too may finally come to rest in the self¹⁵ and so be dedicated to God.¹⁶

Sankara enumerates the function of mind and soul. According to him Mind is responsible for concepts (Samkalpa) and doubt (Vikalpa), while soul is characterized by determination (Niscaya), both in the sense of defining objects as they really are and in determining a cause of action.

THE LOGIC OF BHAKTI:

Every logical and philosophical explanation of religious truth is bound to be Paradoxical and it cannot be expressed in a precise logical formula. The feeling of the heart of a devotee is different from the rigorous principles of heartless logic. Hinduism, observes Zaehner, in particular resists any 'either-or' approach and it is essentially a religion of 'both end'. The Samkhya system sought to divide reality into two principles. What the Gita sets out to do is to bring the two together again in a more or less coherent whole.

SEMANTICE OF 'BHAJ' AND 'BHAKTI':

The word Bhakti comes from the root 'bhaj'. Bhakti is a past participle and



here means 'loyal and devoted'. The root meaning of 'bhaj' is to share in, participate in. This root idea is never quite lost, but in classical Sanskrit it comes to mean increasingly 'to participate in something or someone through affection'. In the Epics we find the following meanings:

1. In the Ramayana we come across 'bhajasva dharmam'¹⁷ and it means cultivate or enjoy dharma. Also it is said "let Bharata today enjoy the office of heir apparent without let or hindrance".
2. Again in Ramayana we read 'bhavatah Putram ekam tu sulam etad bhajisyate'¹⁸ which means this state shall belong to your son alone. Here it means 'belongs to'.
3. In Mahabharata it reads – 'Kshama mam bhajate'¹⁹. It means here 'inhere in', 'attend on'. Also it reads in the critical edition, 'na gunas tam bhajanti vai'²⁰ and it means the constituents do not inhere in him. Again 'na bhajanti nripam Sri yah',²¹ i.e., prosperity does attend on king.
4. In the same book we read 'Ayam Sva.... Bhakto mam nityam eva'²² 'this dog is ever loyal and devoted to me'. This usually refers to the loyalty of an inferior to a superior, but the opposite relationship is sometimes also indicated. For example, in Ramayana we read

Bhaktimanti hi bhutani Jangama ajangamani ca

Yacamanesu tesu tram bhaktim bhaktesu darsaya²³

"Both moving and unmoving creatures are devoted and loyal shows loyalty to these loyal men who supplicate you. Very frequently it is used here in a religious sense. In Mahabharata Karna says to his father, Sun, - 'bhagavantam aham bhakto'.²⁴ I am loyally devoted to you.

5. It also appears as 'bhaja mam bhajamanam' i.e. 'to make love to who love you'. It is a direct invitation to sexual love which is not present in Gita. This kind of sense becomes prominent in the Radha-Krishna cult.

DIVINE DISPENSATION:

'In whatsoever way devoted men approach Me, in that same way do I return their love'²⁵. 'Prapad' means not only to approach but also to be utterly devoted to somebody. According to Sankara God rewards different people in different ways. He grants the things they desire just in accordance with the way in which they seek God and the motive with which they seek God. God grants the desires (phala, fruits) of the self-interested, gives wisdom (Jnana) to those who aspire for them. he grants liberation to those who seek it. One cannot indeed peruse the pleasure and at the same time seek Moksa also because this is strictly incompatible with a genuine desire for Moksa.

TYPES OF DEVOTEES:

There are four main reasons why men turn to God with faith and seek his



grace. First there are men who seek material ends – ‘wealth seekers’ – who as the worshippers of old prayed to the Devas to reward their sacrifices with abundance of cows and other worldly goods.²⁶ This is a kind of selfish devotion. Second, there are men who turn to God in trouble,²⁷ for deliverance from their afflictions. Third, there are men who seek after knowledge of God and the fourth there are men who have attained it. Of these four types of devotees last are the most perfect votaries; for they devote themselves in love to God whose nature they understand. They go over beyond the veil of delusion and see both the personal and impersonal God. Nor, conversely, can the jnanin be perfect in his knowledge unless he thus utterly devotes himself to the one he knows.

Duty, devotion, action and knowledge coincide here. Duty cannot rightly be done without devotion, nor devotion rightly expressed apart from duty. Action and knowledge are conjoined here. Just as actions must be performed with knowledge, so also action must be performed in loving service to God. The aspirant must intent on God, dependent on God, making his way and goal, should perform actions. Here reason and emotion meets, are expressed in action. Jnana and Bhakti coincide here. The desire for progeny, cattle, Svarga and the like deprive men of their power to discriminate and, therefore, they resort to other Devas (Gods). They engage in rites peculiar to the worship of these Gods. Therefore whatever form of God a man of desires worships in devotion and faith he is confirmed of his faith in the worship of that same form.

KIRTANA AND SAMKIRTANA: SMARANA :

The signs of the man who ‘takes his stand in nature that is divine’ are ‘tranquility; self-control compassion and faith’. The Lord is easily won by him who bears Him in mind unceasingly, thinking of nothing else at all. Released from the confusion of duality, steady in their vows, they love and worship God. Bhakta is one who possesses the sameness and indifference or equanimity²⁸ (Samatva drastic) and skill in performing actions and the unlinking of the link with suffering and pain²⁹ But of all, the aspirants the man of faith who loves and honours God, his inmost self (Pratyagatman) absorbed in God – is dearer to God. This is the highest form of loving devotion, the Para bhakti which God bestows on the man who has already become Brahman. Note, here, again the combination of knowledge, devotion and action – “Jnatva – bhaktya – Nityayuktah”³⁰

DIFFERENT CULTS OF DEVOTION :

Men well versed in three Vedas worship God with sacrifices seeking to go to Heaven. And in that heavenly realm they enjoy the pleasures of Heaven.³¹ They enjoy the broad world of Heaven and when their merit is spent, enter the world of mortals. Thus these men who follow the path of rituals and sacrifices come and go, for it in the world of desire (Kamaloka) they dwell. On the other hand men who think of God and worship God attain God. Even those who are devoted to other Gods and sacrifice to them, possessed of faith, even they offer to God, but not as the norm



demands.

The idea is whether the Gita lends its support to the faith of the people who worship Gods. Yes, it lends its support. The reason is, as it is said in Gita, they are really worshipping the God. The justification is simple because it is the God, who is the real enjoyer of all the sacrifices, and this is not recognized by the people and therefore they return to the world of men.

“To the Lords of Heaven go they who pay their Vows to Heaven’s Lords, to the Fathers go they Who pay their vows to the Fathers, to the Ghosts go they who offer to the ghosts, and To Me, too, do they go who sacrifice to me”³²

SIMPLE ACT OF DEVOTION :

‘If any earnest soul makes offering to Me with devotion, of a leaf, or a flower or a fruit or water, that offering of devotion I enjoy’ .³³ Whatever work a man does whatever he eats should be sacrificed or whatever austerities he does should be sacrificed. Then such a man will be released from the bonds of the results of good and bad actions. If a man worships God with undivided devotion, even though he is a sinner, he is saved. The base born, serfs are saved in the Bhakti Marga. In order to be saved one should set his mind on God, one should do the loving service, prostrate to God, then only is he saved. Wise men knowing that God is the source of all, commune with God, abide in God, love God, fix their thoughts on God. To such men out of compassion, God destroys the darkness that dwells in them and bestows on them the devotion of knowledge.

ANANYA BHAKTI (Exclusive Devotion):

The universal form which Arjuna saw cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, by the sacrifices, by gifts, by rituals, nor by severe austerities .³⁴ But by undistracted devotion the universal form of God can be known and seen in reality and one can enter into it.³⁵ This is called Ananya Bhakti, which means that kind of devotion which does not seek any other object except the Lord.

The love of God should exclude all other love. God is easily won by them who bears God in mind, unceasingly, thinking of nothing else at all. All great souls take up their stand in a nature that is divine and they love and worship God knowing his attributes. Those men who worship God without any other thought in their mind will attain God. Even the evil doer is changed by the love of God .³⁶

According to Gita the man of faith who loves and honors God, his inmost self (Pratyagatman) absorbed in God is the best among the yogins. But those who revere the imperishable, the indefinable, the unmanifest, the omnipresent the unthinkable, the unchangeable, the immutable, the eternal, and who hold check on senses, in all things equal-minded also attain to God. Here, Upasana, according to Sankara, means focusing one’s attention on an object recommended by scripture and drawing near to it, one remains in its presence for a long time sustained by the current of constant intention



like a stream of oil.³⁷

But the trouble is greater to those whose thoughts are set on the unman feast because the goal, i.e., the unman fest is very hard to attain by the embodied men. And the other hand, those who cast off all actions and worships God, meditate on God with exclusive devotion will be released from the samsara. Now it is clear that Gita lays stress on worship, meditation and love on God.

But people who lack the strength to let their thoughts on God and who do not stir the soul to enter God, they then should work and act for God. These are the acts of devotion like building temples and other public utility places.

“Better is knowledge than constant practice; and Than knowledge meditation is more excellent; Than meditation, abandonment of the fruit of the Work, after abandonment, peace ensues”³⁸

The classic virtues of detachment and indifference are only perfected if they are complemented by the love of God. Abandonment of the fruit of action in a spirit of devotion is better than mere ‘meditation’ that would reject all loving service; and ‘meditation’ is better than ‘knowledge’ of the intellect, that would dispense with work and yet not know the warmth of love; while ‘constant Practice’ that lacks the steadiness of knowledge, and shares its cold indifference to devotion, is lowest of all methods.

VIRTUES OF A DEVOTEE:

The devotee feels no hatred for other beings. He is friendly with all beings. He is compassionate and is devoid of the feeling of ‘I and Mine’. The devotee is ever content, self restrained, firmly convinced, free from impatience, fear and agitation, worships God and loves God and is loved by God, God loves the man and is the same to friend or foe, whether he be respected or despised, the same in heat and cold, in pleasures and pain, who has put away attachment and remains unmoved by praise and blame.

ANALYSIS OF THEN DESCRIPTION OF LIBERATION:

We shall attempt to analyse the relationship between liberation and loving devotion. In the first place it is said that a man should sit curbing all his senses integrated, intent on God. One should put away all the desires, should not think ‘this is mine or this I am’. Such or the state of the Jivanmukta, released still alive and waiting only for liberation from the body.³⁹

In other place meditation on the birth and incarnate life of God and a real concentration on the being of God is combined with the stilling of the passions and with knowledge and intuitive apprehension of the eternal. The result is to draw near to God and to his eternal mode of being. This is possible by removing passion, fear, anger and by taking refuge in God by Pure knowledge, hard penance and devotion.⁴⁰

Another description, which we come across in Gita, is purely negative. It



describes the discovery of wisdom in the self, which means the total destruction of actions. It is a process of elimination of all activity to realize the pure consciousness. As kindled fire reduces its fuel to ashes, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all action to ashes. Nothing resembles the fire of knowledge to purify. A man of faith, intent wisdom, his senses restrained wins knowledge; and knowledge won, he attains the supreme peace (Param Santi) ⁴¹

In all these descriptions it is peace, stillness, rest, that is emphasized. "Free from desire, with the mind and the self controlled, having relinquished all possessions doing mere bodily actions, he incurs no sin". Content to take whatever chance may bring his way, surmounting all dualities, knowing no envy, the same in success and failure, though working, still he is not bound. Here God is recognized for what He is, omnipotent and beneficent Lord.

THE DOCTRINE OF BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI:

Ramanuja says that Bhakti is the contemplation of God, accompanied by love. For him Bhakti is a continuous loving meditation of God and the Stream of the loving meditation should be like an unbroken stream of oil. Ramanuja says that God protects all individuals irrespective of their differences. He is the refuge of all beings. In short, 'Bhakti is the constant remembrance of the Jiva's total subservience to God, inspired and animated by a perfect love of worship' ⁴²

Ramanuja's views on Bhakti as they appear in the Gita Bhasya are essentially the same as those of the Sri Bhasya. In his Gita commentary he repeatedly makes it clear that the individual soul should merge with the supreme self. He quotes several scriptural passages in support of this and says that one should be a Bhakta of God, and focus one's mind on God. One should have an overwhelming love towards God. One should worship God when he is capable of cognizing god as the immeasurable and incomparable one. A man having an overwhelming love of God alone can attain God through worship. In order to attain that love towards God, one should perform all the periodical and occasional actions in a disinterested way. These are helpful in originating the love towards God. Finally, while realizing that God will rule the world, one should meditate upon the multitude of His adorable perfections, and one should worship God so as to attain Him alone ⁴³

From the above explanation of the nature of Bhakti it is evident that actions are also important even in the Bhakti-Yoga. They have an indirect role to play in attaining God. The active life of a man. If dedicated to God could be in different ways depending upon man's intention. This is possible in four ways. The devotees or the aspirants are classified in the Gita into four types. They are: Arta, Artharthi, Jijnasu and jnani.

1. Arta is the individual who seeks the help of God when he is in danger or is in a helpless condition.
2. Artharthi is the individual who aspires for wealth and prosperity (Aisvarya).



3. Jijnasu is the individual who possesses an ardent desire to know Brahman.
4. Jnani is an individual who had the knowledge of Brahman and who does not seek God for worldly prosperity, and who does not seek God for any other selfish end but whose only aim is God realization.

Examples can be multiplied for these four types of aspirants.

While agreeing with this kind of classification, ramanuja says that the first and the second can be merged into one group while the third and the, fourth into another. Thus we can have two types of aspirants viz.,

- (1) The aspirant of Aisvary or Aisvardhin and
- (2) The aspirant of Kaivalya, kaivalyardhi.

The aspirant of Aisvarya will remain in the world to reap the results of his actions. The aspirant of Kaivalya does not seek God for prosperity, but will have an exclusive love and knowledge of God. In the course of time his knowledge and love for God will be more intensified and ultimately he will attain God.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF BHAKTI:

From the above analysis of Bhakti, it appears that we can classify Bhakti into (1) Sadhana Bhakti (devotion as a means) and (2) Parabhakti and Parama Bhakti. Sadhana Bhakti is more of the nature of knowledge than of love and longing. This is the stage. When the mumukshu seeks to purify his mind by practicing Sama, Dama and Uparati, with a view to attain the true knowledge of his soul. This stage is called "Atmavalokna", which necessarily results in a true realization of God. Sadhana Bhakti, though primarily considered to be a kind of knowledge, cannot be called as Jnana because, the "Mumukshu" does not seek the help of God to attain liberation, as is done in the Jnana Yoga.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT ALIEN TO BHAKTI AND KARMA:

Ramanuja demits a very close connection between Bhakti, Jnana and Karma. He regards that knowledge is the cause of Bhakti. According to him knowledge is the very foundation of Bhakti and it is Jnana that produces Bhakti and also nourishes and enriches it. In the process of attaining liberation, an individual should, first of all, try to acquire the true knowledge of the Atman and then distinguish the soul from all its necessary accompaniments and also from all other inanimate objects of the world. When a man acquires the true knowledge of the soul and when he understands that his soul is only a mode of Brahman on which it depends, he will succeed in realizing his true being in relation to the ultimate source of the world. As a consequence of this realization one feels an intensive love and affection for God in whom he lives, moves and has his being. This kind of Bhakti can remain fixed in the mind only through constant meditation and reflection on the nature of the Brahman therefore, Bhakti consists of knowledge coupled with intense affection and respect for God. The essence



of Bhakti lies in the complete self surrender to the Brahman, who is the Lord and Protector of the whole universe and such surrender takes place only when the individual soul realizes his nature and the relation between himself and Brahman. Love or adoration cannot spring forth in the heart of a man unless he knows the nature of the object he is loving.

Jnana and Karma (knowledge and action) are necessary for the awakening of Bhakti in the heart of a man. Karma, according to Ramanuja, is such a thing that it should not be abandoned at any stage of life. One can perform disinterested actions only if one has knowledge of the Atman. As such, both knowledge and action are mutually inclusive.

Ramanuja emphasizes the performance of disinterested action. The knowledge of Atman and the complete disassociation of the ego-consciousness are the two important requirements to perform the disinterested action. It is because of the identification of an individual's soul with ego-consciousness. One thinks of himself as the doer of actions and the enjoyer of their results. When one feels and realizes that the soul is essentially different from the body and mind then only one becomes fit to perform the desireless actions. Interested action is an action which is illumined by the knowledge of the self.

Knowledge, therefore, is not alien to Bhakti and Karma. On the other hand, it is an important ingredient of both devotion and disinterested action. In the first stage, knowledge is necessary to purify all the actions of the devotee. The devotee has to realize that his soul is different from the body and the sense organs. One has to understand that Prakriti is not his substratum and the idea that the soul is associated with all the organs is to be shunned. This kind of knowledge helps to give the sense of an agency of all worldly activities. In the second stage, the true knowledge of the soul gives him a firm faith in God as the individual's sole source and support. In this stage the devotee's mind will be illumined with knowledge of God. Here, all philosophical interpretations of the relation such as "Sarira-Sariri bhava" (body and soul feeling), "Prakara-prakari bhava" (body and substance feeling), and "Sesha-Seshibhava" (Principal and accessory feeling), are directly experienced by the devotee. When the devotee looks upon God as his sole refuge then the knowledge generates a deep love for God in the mind of the devotee. In this stage knowledge becomes the cause of Bhakti. In the last stage when knowledge deepens into the highest form of Bhakti, it assumes the constant form of meditation, always thinking on the nature (Svarupa) of God. Thus, when a man attains a full knowledge of his absolute dependence on God, he at once shifts his attention from the worldly objects to God. And gives up his egoism totally. He will perform all actions with a complete detachment and meditates constantly on the nature of God.

A question may be asked here: What form of God is constantly contemplated upon the devotee in this stage of Paramabhakti? According to Ramanuja the devotee visualizes God, as one possessing infinite auspicious qualities, devoid of all faults, and



by repeated meditation of God, the devotee gradually loses all sense of difference. The devotee becomes fully merged in the form of God. There would not be any feeling of substance and its attributes. In other words, all the differences are lost in this state. This is the final stage of bhakti. The non-dualistic consciousness of the liberated soul is expressed in the feeling “I am Brahman without any division”. This non-quality does not mean “Svarupa Aikya” but “Visista Aikya’ in which the self is realised as an inseparable mode of God, who is its only support and substratum. By acquiring equality of attributes with God the individual soul also becomes as pure as Brahman.

THE NATURE OF THE LIBERATED SOUL:

When an individual soul is liberated through devotion and divine grace, he loses his natural body and passes through Vayuloka, Varunaloka, Adityaloka, Indraloka, Prajapathiloka, Brahmhaloka and finally reaches the eternal abode or Vaikuntha. It is only this state of emancipation that a liberated man becomes completely free from the influence of all his virtuous and vicious deeds and becomes similar to Brahman.⁴⁴

As soon as liberation is attained, the soul reins its true nature and becomes disassociated from the natural body with which it remains identical in the state of bondage. On regaining its true nature in the form of pure consciousness, it also gains back its other qualities such as Sarvajnatva, Satyasamkalpatva etc., which remain covered by ignorance in worldly life.⁴⁵ The liberated soul can attain everything he wishes just by willing it. Liberation, therefore, does not mean emergence of any new quality but the soul being free from the defects of ignorance gains back its natural luminosity and shines in its divine glory.

Ramanuja says that due to the presence of the quality of Satyasamkalpatva in a liberated soul, it can be embodied and disembodied according to its will.⁴⁶ The liberated souls can also assume the forms of divine instruments or Upakaranas which can be used in the service of God.

It is stated above that a liberated soul by regaining its nature as the form of consciousness becomes similar to God. But this similarity should not be confused with total identity. The soul is not identical with God as it differs from God in a very important quality. God is the creator of the universe but the soul can never possess the power to create the world. The liberated soul is similar to God in the sense that in the state of emancipation it becomes endowed with qualities like Sarvajnatva, Satya-samkalpatva which are present in the God. It also acquires the power of enjoying eternally the bliss that comes out of the realizing the nature of Brahman. Thus, the soul, whether embodied or liberated is ontologically different from God. Scriptural passages confirm this. Prapatti and Saranagati are accessories to Bhakti. Hence the discussion about prapatti follows.

THE DOCTRINE OF PRAPATTI:

According to ramanuja Bhakti is the supreme way of attaining God. But prapatti is a secondary one. This is clear from his Gita Bhasya. The general meaning of ‘prapad’,



according to Ramanuja, is “to take refuge in”. This refuge may be either in God or in this human form, and is taken by following his commands. So it can also be applied to man’s taking refuge in divine being as the principal object of worship. Some times Ramanuja calls it an activity which leads to bhakti.⁴⁷ The Gita says that the approach to the Lord presuppose the true knowledge of Atman.⁴⁸ Bhakti it which presuppose prapthti, is the only means from the aisvaryarthin, kaivalyarthin and Jnanin to achieve their respective ends.⁴⁹ By taking refuge in God one may attain the immediate knowledge of Atman. Ramanuja says that through prapatti one can conquer the gunas and can attain aisvarya and kaivalya and finally God.

Prapatti is to take refuge in God. While cherishing the conviction that God is everything because he is the inner ruler of all, so that if one desires to achieve a certain end, be it prosperity or the attainment of God, one has to follow God, obey God, and act accordingly. It is the nearest approach of the aisvaryathi. To kaivalyarthin. Prapatti is an activity presupposed by Bhakti. Though it is understood that in prapatti God showers his grace, there is not evidence that Ramanuja believed that prapatti alone would be sufficient.

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3. Bhagavath Gita, XVIII, P. 54
4. Ibid, IV, p. 11
5. Ibid, II, p. 72.
6. Ibid, IX, p. 34
7. Ibid, II, p. 55
8. Ibid, II, p. 61, (Tani Sarvani)
9. Ibid, II, p. 62.
10. Telang, Bhagavath Gita, II, p. 66, (Tr)
11. Barnett, Bhagavath Gita, II, p. 66.
12. Bhagavath Gita, VI, p. 7.
13. Ibid, VI, p. 24.
14. Ibid, VI, p. 14
15. Ibid, VI, p. 25.
16. Ibid, XII, p. 2 and 8.
17. Ramayana, VI, 9.22, Bharato Bhajatam adya Yauvarajyam.
18. Ibid, VI, 61-14.



19. Mahabharata (Vulgate) 1.6676.
20. Ibid, (Critical) 12.326.21
21. Ibid, 3.2394
22. Ibid, 17.3.7.
23. Ramayana, II, 45.29.
24. Mahabharata, III, 286.1
25. Ibid, IV, 11.
26. Artharathi
27. Ibid.
28. Bhagavath Gita, II, p. 48.
29. Ibid, VI, 23.
30. Cf. Bhagavath Gita, IX, 13 & 14.
31. Bhagavath Gita, IX, p. 20.
32. Ibid, IX, p. 25.
33. Ibid, IX, p. 26.
34. Ibid, XI, p. 48.
35. Ibid, XI, p. 54.
36. Cf. Bhagavath Gita, VIII, p. 14, IX, p. 13, 22, 30.
37. Bhagavath Gita, XII, p. 4
38. Ibid, XII, p. 12.
39. Ibid, II, p. 71.2.
40. Ibid, IV, p. 9.11.
41. Ibid, IV, p. 37.9.
42. Sri Bhasya, I, p. 1-4.
43. Ramanuja Gita Bhasya, Tr. Jan. Van Buiteen, pp. 22-23.
44. Mundaka Up. III, p. 1-1.
45. Sri Bhasya, IV, p. 4-2.
46. Ibid, IV, p. 4-12.
47. Ramayan, Bhagavath Gita, VIII, p. 15.
48. Ibid, VII, p. 19
49. Ibid, XIV, 27.