

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 6 | Issue 5

2023

© 2023 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

This article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to submission@ijlmh.com.

Ramanuja's View on Visishtavaita and Bhakti

JANHAVI DEO YADAV¹

ABSTRACT

Ramanuja's philosophy is also known as Vishishtadvaita Vedanta. The Upanishads, which are also referred to as the Vedas because they come after the Vedas, serve as its foundation, much like other Vedic systems do as well.

It is difficult to create a philosophical framework based on the Upanishads. The problem is that there are two categories of claims in these latter Vedic writings that seem to contradict one another. One set of assertions connects Brahman, the supreme reality, with the universe (jagat) and the individual souls (jiva) that reside therein. The Upanishads also have a different set of assertions that make a distinct distinction between these three—jagat, jiva, and Brahman—clearly. At the heart of Vedantic philosophy is the triad of Brahman, jiva, and jagat, which represents nature of reality, independent beings, and the universe. In fact, it is quite crucial.

The body-soul link of Brahman, jagat, and jiva is then further discussed by Ramanuja. He holds that the jivas and jagats make up Brahman, who is their soul. Then he claims that when the Upanishads make a distinction between jagat, jiva, and Brahman, they are simply referring toward an actual facts that can be noticed. The Upanishads speak to the inseparability of Brahman and jagat and jiva when they state that they are same (and not identity, as Shankara would have us believe). This also explains the meaning of the phrase Vishishtadvaita, which stands for non-dualism or the unity of the qualified and the embodied. The creativity and intelligence with which the Upanishadic dilemma was addressed has to make a lasting impression on one.

Another paradox in the Upanishads is the description of Brahman as either nirguna, or lacking distinctive traits or attributes, or as saguna, or possessing them. In Advaita Vedanta, this nirguna Brahman is equated with pure (objectless) consciousness. According to Ramanuja, consciousness as we understand it is always cognizant of something, and objectless consciousness is a pure abstraction. He selects saguna as the highest manifestation of Brahman as a result, understanding any mention of it as nirguna to signify that it had "no negative attributes." The ultimate reality is a physical individual rather than an impersonal idea. It is not an Absolute; rather, it is God, whom followers love and who

¹ Author is a student at Christ University, India.

loves them in return. In this way, Ramanuja formed the trinity of Brahman, Jagat, Jiva and the nature of brahmin.

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the following questions: firstly, what is the concept of The Visishtadvaita Philosophy of Ramanuja? Secondly, what is the significance of Ramanuja's epistemology in bhakti? Thirdly, why is soteriology necessary in an individual's life according to Ramanuja?

Keywords: Brahman, God, Laksmi, Ramanuja, Vedas, Vishnu, Visistadvaita.

I. INTRODUCTION

The principal proponent of Visistadvaita, one of the three main varieties of the Orthodox Hindu philosophical school, Vedanta. Ramanuja, who lived in the eleventh century. As the founder of the Visistadvaita tradition, is one of the most significant and influential individuals in Indian philosophy. He is well known for advancing the bhakti, or devotion to a personal God, as having significant epistemic and soteriological value. He was also the first philosopher from India to provide a methodical theistic explanation of Vedic thought. Contrary to many of his contemporaries, Ramanuja affirmed the existence of a range of distinctive individuals, characteristics, values, and things while emphasising the universality of all. According to some sources, Ramanuja had such a significant impact on mainstream Hindu practise that his philosophical system is the cornerstone of popular Hinduism. His two major philosophical works, Sri Bhasya and Vedarthasangraha, rank among the most rigorous and intense examples of philosophical argumentation in all philosophical traditions. They are both masterpieces of Indian scholastic philosophy and rank among the best philosophical literature ever. In three major commentaries, he provided an intellectual foundation for the practise of bhakti (devotional worship) which are: the Vedartha-samgraha (on the Vedas, Hinduism's earliest scriptures), the Shri-bhashya (on the Brahma-sutras), and the Bhagavadgita-bhashya (on the Bhagavadgita) (on the Bhagavadgita).²

II. LIFE AND WORKS

He is said to have been born in the ancient Madras state of southern India, which is now known as Tamil Nadu. Early indications of his theological prowess led to his being sent to Kanchi (Kanchipuram), where he studied under the monistic (Advaita) philosophy of Vedanta advocated by Shankara's student Yadavaprakasha. Ramanuja's intense religiosity rapidly ran afoul of a doctrine that disallowed the concept of a personal god. Following a disagreement

² Today, *Philosophy: The Brilliance of Ramanuja - Hinduism Today*, 2022

with his teacher, he had a vision of the god Vishnu and his consort Shri and established a daily worship ritual at the location where he saw them.³

He accepted a post as a temple priest at the Varadaraja temple in Kanchi, where he began to propagate the idea that, rather than the impersonal brahman, the brahman as connected to the personal god Vishnu is the goal of those seeking ultimate freedom (moksha) from reincarnation. Consequently, he formulated the idea that the teachings of the Vaishnavas and Bhagavatas (worshippers and passionate devotees of Lord Vishnu) are not unorthodox because they are an integral component of the doctrines of the Upanishads, on which the system of Vedanta is based. This teaching was developed in Kanchi as well as Shrirangam. In this, he carried on the teachings of his predecessor at Shrirangam, Yamuna (Yamunacharya; 10th century), to whom he was related on his mother's side.⁴This doctrine was laid out in his three major commentaries.

Like many Hindu intellectuals, he undertook a yearlong pilgrimage, travelling around India from Rameswaram to Badrinath, and then back along the east coast. According to mythology, he later suffered from King Kulottunga of the Chola dynasty's fervour as he retreated to Mysore in the west and committed himself to the god Shiva. There, he converted a large number of Jains as well as King Bittideva of the Hoysala dynasty, which resulted in the establishment of the town Milukote (Melcote, present-day Karnataka state) in 1099 and the dedication of a temple to Shelva Pillai (Sanskrit, Sampatkumara, the name of a form of Vishnu). He returned to Shrirangam after 20 years, where he allegedly organised temple worship and established 74 centres to spread his doctrine. According to legend, he died in 1137 after living for 120 years.⁵

The Vedarthasangraha (Summary of the Meaning of the Vedas') was most likely Ramanuja's first work. It outlines Ramnauja's theistic (affirms a morally perfect, omniscient, and omnipotent God) and realistic philosophy (it affirms the existence and reality of a plurality of qualities, persons and objects). This work is mentioned several times in Ramanuja's magnum opus, the Sri Bhasya (also known as his Brahma Sutra Bhasya), his commentary on the Brahma Sutra. Outside of the Sri Vaisnava tradition, Ramanuja is best known for this work.⁶ In addition to this lengthy commentary on the Brahma Sutra, Ramanuja appears to have written two shorter commentaries: Vedantapida and Vedantasara. Ramanuja's most important philosophical work, aside from the Vedarthasangraha and Sri Bhasya, is a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (Bhagavad Gita Bhasya). In addition to these philosophical works, Ramanuja is said to

³ Clooney, F., 2022. *Rāmānuja's Eleventh Century Hindu Theology of Religious Experience*.

⁴ Guide to the J. A. B. van Buitenen Papers 1946-1978, 2022

⁵ Id

⁶ Bhakti Schools of Vedānta, 2022

have written three prose hymns known collectively as the Gadya Traya (Sarangati Gadya, Sriraga Gadya, and Vaikuntha Gadya). In the Saragati Gadya, Ramanuja converses with Sri (Lakmi) and Narayana (Vishnu), two Hindu deities who together represent God (or Brahman) for Ramanuja. He offers himself up to God and asks Vishnu for his Grace through Lakmi. Ramanuja's gesture of surrender has been welcomed by Vishnu and Lakmi. The Sriranga Gadya is a surrender prayer to Ranganatha's feet. (This is Vishnu resting on the milk ocean's many-headed serpent Adi Sesa -'ancient servant,' 'ancient residue,' or 'primal matter'.) The eternal region of Vishnu, known as Vaikuna, which one needs contemplate in order to gain nirvana, is described in great detail in the Vaikuna Gadya. Finally, Ramanuja is said to have documented the Nityagrantha, a daily worship manual.⁷

III. RAMANUJA'S PHILOSOPHY OF VISISHTAVAITA

The Visishtadvaita is so titled because it instils Advaita, or God's oneness, with Visesha, or attributes. As a result, it is qualified monism. Only God exists. Everything else seen is His manifestations or attributes. Though it is one, God or Lord Narayana of Sri Ramanuja is a complex organic whole—Visishta. Thus the name Visishtadvaita.⁸

All qualities or manifestations, according to Sri Sankara, are unreal and transient. They are caused by Avidya, or ignorance. The attributes, according to Sri Ramanuja, are real and permanent. They are, however, under the control of a single Brahman. Despite the existence of attributes, God can be one because they cannot exist independently; they are not independent entities. Prakaras, or modes, Sesha, or accessories, and Niyama, or controlled aspects, of the one Brahman.⁹

Ramanuja's well-known philosophy, Visishtadvaita or qualified monism, is Advaita or non-dualism with a qualification, or Visesha. It allows for diversity. Sri Ramanuja's Brahman or Lord Narayana exists in a variety of forms, including souls (Chit) and matter (Achit). As a result, it is known as Visishtadvaita, or qualified non-dualism. Vaishnavism is based on Visishtadvaita philosophy. Sri Sampradaya is the name given to Ramanuja's cult or creed. Vaishnavas are his followers. Ramanuja systematised Vaishnavism's philosophy. Sri Vaishnavism is Ramanuja's religion because 'Sri' or the Goddess Lakshmi is made to have an important role to play in the salvation of the soul.¹⁰

⁷ Id

⁸ Rāmānuja Ācārya, biography, works, 2022

⁹ Id

¹⁰ Id

For the vast majority of people, Sri Sankara's philosophy is too high, subtle, and abstruse. However, Sri Ramanuja's philosophy is appropriate for those who are preoccupied with devotion. According to Sri Ramanuja's philosophy, the Lord (Narayana) has two inseparable Prakaras or modes: the world and the souls. These are related to Him in the same way that the body is related to the soul. They do not exist apart from Him. They are inherent in Him as attributes in a substance. The Lord's body is made up of matter and souls. Their indweller is the Lord. He is Reality's mastermind. Subordinate elements are matter and souls. They are known as Viseshanas, or attributes. God is the qualified Viseshya.¹¹

IV. RAMANUJA'S THEISM

Unlike previous commentators on the Brahma Sutra, Ramanuja's version of Vedanta is explicitly theistic. Brahman as Atman (the Highest Self of All) is the result of the union of two deities: Vishnu, or Narayana, and His Consort Sri, or Laksmi. (Vishnu is the Hindu God who upholds and preserves all things, and Laksmi is the Goddess of prosperity.) Ramanuja requires the unity of both the father (Vishnu) and mother (Laksmi) elements in Brahman. It is a result of the belief that Brahman is ubhayalingam, or having both sexes: this explains Brahman's creative power. According to Ramanuja, Brahman (also known as the Atman) is antagonistic to all evil, devoid of all flaws (papam, heya, mala, or dosa), and possessed of innumerable auspicious qualities (kalyanguna).¹²

According to Ramanuja, the highest Self (Atman) stands in the place of all other people as their parent. Ramanuja, like many Vedantins, denies the Medieval Christian idea of creation ex nihilo: Brahman does not create distinct individuals or fundamental, non-relational characteristics because these are eternal features of its body. Brahman does engage in a form of creation in which he grants individuals the fruits of their desires (whatever they are). This dispensation results in the organisation of the elements that comprise Brahman's body into the cosmos.¹³

V. RAMANUJA'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Ramanuja's arguments and diagnosis of the state of bondage (samsara), or non-liberation, are dominated by epistemic concerns. Ramanuja, like many Indian philosophers, believes that liberation is attained through the cessation of nescience. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Ramanuja does not believe that reason is a self-contained source of knowledge

¹¹ A Critical Study of The Philosophy of Ramanuja | Exotic India Art, 2022

¹² The Theology of Rāmānuja, 2022

¹³ Id

capable of dispelling ignorance. Ramanuja takes a position similar to naive empiricism. According to naive empiricism, the only knowledge that one can have is knowledge gained through personal experience.¹⁴

Ramanuja concludes that all true or first-rate knowledge consists of a perceptual connection here between perceiver and an element of knowledge, known as knowledge de re, as compared to a believer and a statement or proposition, known as knowledge de dicto, his perspective is comparable to naive empiricism. Ramanuja disagrees with some naive empiricism proponents in that he does not consider a cursory familiarity with knowledge objects to be sufficient. Only via direct perception of an object is knowledge possible. Ramanuja does not confine knowledge to what may be learned through the senses, in contrast to proper empiricists. Ramanuja asserts that the individual ego has the capacity for obtaining direct visions of transcendent beings like Brahmana.¹⁵

Ramanuja's belief that bhakti, or devotion, is an epistemic state in and of itself, is his singular contribution to Indian epistemology. We've seen that Ramanuja's method of knowing Brahman involves experiencing it personally. When bhakti develops within a person, it becomes parabhakti, the purest form of bhakti. Bhakti is a sort of knowledge since it is always a direct realisation of the essence of Brahman. The perceptual nature of bhakti is occasionally obscured by Ramanuja's synonyms for this state. He refers to it as meditation or worship at times. However, he insists that it is a type of seeing with the characteristics of direct perception.¹⁶

VI. RAMANUJA AND SOTERIOLOGY

According to Ramanuja, our greatest good is to be constantly aware of our true nature (as modes of Brahman) and of the nature of Brahman. When all obstacles to this awareness are removed, the individual achieves moksa (liberation). For Ramanuja, knowledge of Brahman leads to liberation, owing to the nature of Brahman. Entities other than Brahman, he writes, can be objects of such joy-related cognitions only to a limited extent and for a limited duration. But Brahman is such that knowing him brings infinite and lasting joy. Because of this, the sruti says, 'Brahman is bliss.' Because the form of cognition as joy is determined by its object, Brahman is joy.¹⁷

Ramanuja makes it clear that theoretical knowledge of Brahman's nature will not suffice to obtain liberation. Our embodied state imposes psychological constraints on us, which must be

¹⁴ van Buitenen, J. and Carman, J., *The Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding*, 2022

¹⁵ Supra Note 11

¹⁶ Id

¹⁷ Supra Note 11

overcome. According to Ramanuja, the solution is to practise bhakti yoga, often known as the Bhagavad Gita's discipline of worship. Two essential elements of this type of yoga are undertaking one's duties with the philosophical conviction that they should be done for their own good rather than for the reward of their effects (also known as karma yoga) and consistently worshipping Brahman, particularly by devoting all of one's labour to Brahman. Bhakti yoga's advantages include these characteristics. First, they atone for past unfavourable actions (karmas), the consequences of which impede full appreciation of reality. Second, they instil subservience to Brahman. This is valuable to Ramanuja because service to God constitutes an unbroken appreciation of Brahman's nature.¹⁸

VII. CRITICISM

Ramanuja's philosophy, which is deeply religious and devotional in nature, denies the existence of any other categories other than aware souls, the unconscious world, and God as the righteous master of both. The idea of souls and matter as qualities or differentiators fails because there is nothing to differentiate. The enhancement of the substance to which they belong is another purpose of characteristics. Knowing that God is made of matter and souls does not advance our understanding of our relationship with God. Once more, if God is connected to both matter and souls, He is likewise connected to both of those things' defects. One could contend that the Brahman, wherein matter and souls are claimed to exist, is unqualified. If the Brahman is both qualityless and associated with qualities, it will be omniscient only in certain parts of itself.¹⁹ Again, if the pure unassociated Brahman is considered to be omniscient, there will be one Brahman associated with omniscience and other qualities and another Brahman associated with matter and soul, thus the doctrine of qualified monism will collapse. Being outside of souls and matter, pure Brahman would be without a controller within them and thus independent of God.²⁰ Furthermore, God would be associated in some ways with the highest and purest qualities, while in others with the defiled characters of the material world and imperfect souls. Instead, if Brahman were just the ultimate essence endowed with matter and souls, there would be two composite creatures rather than one, and God would be associated with two contrasting groups of pure and impure attributes once more. It is also difficult to comprehend how matter and souls, which are considered to be mutually distinct and different, can be both one with God and yet different from Him under the circumstances if God is acknowledged to be a composite unity

¹⁸ Id

¹⁹ Presuppositions Of India's Philosophy Karl H. Potter : javanesegraviton : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive, 2022

²⁰ Supra Note 6

and if they are acknowledged to be His constituents even though He is different from them in nature.²¹

VIII. CONCLUSION

Ramanuja is regarded as one of the most important figures in Indian philosophy. He was the first intellectual in this tradition to provide a methodical theistic analysis of the significance of the Vedas. His greatest contribution to philosophy is his assertion that human beings must engage in discursive thought in order to seek ultimate truths, that the phenomenal world is real and contains authentic knowledge, and that the demands of daily life are neither harmful to nor incompatible with spiritual life. Ramanuja made a substantial addition to Vedanta theory, but his impact on the development of Hinduism as a religion was far more profound. He has connected popular religion to philosophical endeavours and given bhakti an intellectual basis by infusing the desire for devotional worship (bhakti) into his philosophy of salvation. His steadfast commitment to moral reality and common reason contrasts sharply with stereotypes that Indian philosophical thought is otherworldly and immoral. Although he is revered as a saint, many Southern Indian locations do not recognise his significance in the history of Indian philosophy or his broader impact on the nature and structure of mainstream Hinduism. One of the main channels by which philosophy reached the general public was Ramanuja's tradition, and Visistadvaita may be the most influential school of thought in India at the moment in terms of numbers of followers, whether or not they recognise themselves as such. He was an Indian philosopher who defended the symbiotic relationship of the spiritual, moral, and practical lives.

²¹ Id