

THE SYSTHESIS OF YOGA IN VAISNAVISM OF RĀMĀNUJA

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Vaiṣṇavism as developed by Rāmānuja is one of the oldest living religions of India, having its origin in the R̥gVeda, the earliest religious literature of the world. It is a monotheistic system which upholds Viṣṇu as the ultimate Reality (*paratattva*) and believes that the exclusive and devoted worship of this Deity leads to the realization of the highest Spiritual Goal (*parama-puruṣārtha*). For this purpose it has laid down a way of life which among other things covers a religious and spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). Unlike Śaivism and Śāktaism, the other two major living religions of India, it has a philosophical basis and constitutes a part of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* expounded by Rāmānuja on the authoritative sources of the Upaniṣads, *Vedānta-sūtra* and Bhagavadgīta - the triple foundation of *Vedānta*¹.

Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja is thus closely related to the *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* of Rāmānuja. The two are complementary, one representing the theoretical study of the philosophical doctrines and the other representing the practical side of *Vedānta* dealing with the way of life leading to the realization of the Supreme Spiritual Goal. *Sādhana* or the ways and means of attainment of Viṣṇu, which is the highest goal occupies an important place both in the *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* system and the Religion of Vaiṣṇavism. The term yoga in Vaiṣṇavism, in its broadest sense applies to this *sādhana*. The sanskrit term 'yoga' bears several meanings². In Pātāñjala yoga, the term is used in the technical sense as concentration of mind (*citta-vṛtti nirodha*). It is applicable to the eight-fold discipline (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*) to be practiced for achieving *samādhi* leading to the state of *Kaivalya* or the existence of *puruṣa* (individual self) as totally free from the association of the mind (*citta*) and its functions. In the Bhagavadgīta the term *yoga* is employed in different contexts meaning different things. In the Upaniṣads and the *Vedānta* systems, it is applicable to the *sādhana* or means of attainment of the Supreme Goal and in particular to *dhyāna* or meditation. In some modern religious movements, the term generally refers to the practice of meditation in different forms. However in *Vedānta*, the term *yoga* is applicable specifically to the *sādhana* or the religious and spiritual discipline laid down for the sole purpose of achieving the spiritual goal (*parama-puruṣārtha*).

¹ For details, see S.M. Srinivasa Chari – Vaiṣṇavism, its Philosophy, Theology and Religious Discipline, chapter I.

² See Amarakoṣa, *yogaḥ sannahanopāya dhyāna sangati yuktiṣu*

What is the nature of *yoga* as *sādhana* in Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja? How this doctrine of *sādhana* has been formulated by Rāmānuja by synthesizing different theories on *yoga* as presented in the Upaniṣads, *Purāṇas*, *Pāñcarātra* treatises, Pātañjala yoga school, *Vedānta-sūtra* of Badaṛāyaṇa and Bhagavadgīta in particular? How the doctrine of *sādhana* developed by Rāmānuja differs from Pātañjala yoga, Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* and other post-Rāmānuja theistic schools of Vedānta and also some of the modern religious movements? These are the important points that need to be considered to understand properly the theory of *yoga* in the Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja. The present article is primarily devoted to this matter.

Vedānta is regarded as a *mokṣa-śāstra* or a system of philosophy primarily intended to teach the ways and means of liberation from the bondage in the form of cycle of birth and death in which the individual souls are caught up. The mere knowledge of the Ultimate Reality and other ontological principles is of no value unless it leads to the attainment of a higher goal. Thus the Tattirīya Upaniṣad states: '*Brahmavid-āpnoti param*' – "The knower of Brahman attains the Supreme Goal". The Vedānta therefore accords equal importance to the *sādhana* which is the means of attainment of a ^{fruitful} ~~trustful~~ goal. Hence the *Vedānta-sūtra* of sage Badaṛāyaṇa which is the basic manual of Vedānta philosophy comprising four *adhyāyas*, devotes the first two parts to the discussion of Brahman which is the Ultimate Reality and the entire third *adhyāya* titled '*Sādhanaādhyāya*' deals with the nature of ^{the} *sādhana*, while the fourth *adhyāya* titled '*Phalādhyāya*' is concerned with the discussion of the nature of the Goal. The Upaniṣads which are the fundamental source-books for Vedānta philosophy deal mainly with the nature of Reality and also enjoin the observance of *sādhana* for the attainment of Brahman. The Bhagavad-gītā which is another important source-book for Vedānta lays greater emphasis on *sādhana*. The *Yoga darśana* of Pātañjali, which is one of the important schools of Indian philosophy, is also devoted mainly to lay down an elaborate religio-spiritual discipline for achieving *Samādhi*, leading to *Kaivalya*, a state of total liberation of *puruṣa* or the individual self from the shackles of bondage. The theory of *yoga* in the correct sense of *sādhana* or *upāya* for attainment of a higher Spiritual Goal should therefore take into consideration the teachings contained in all these source-books viz. Upaniṣads, the *Vedānta-sūtra*, the Bhagavad-gītā, the *Yoga darśana* of Pātañjali and allied treatises such as Viṣṇu-purāṇa and Bhāgavata among the *purāṇas*. A sound and philosophical doctrine of *yoga* as means to *mokṣa* or the liberation of the

soul from bondage should incorporate all these ideas and present a consolidated doctrine of *śādhana*. As will be seen later, such a perfect synthesis of yoga is brought about only by Rāmānuja in the Vaiṣṇavism developed by him, unlike the other schools of Vaiṣṇavism of the post-Rāmānuja period.

Briefly stated, Bhakti-yoga, according to Rāmānuja, is the direct means to *mokṣa*. This view is based on the authority of the Bhagavad-gītā which explicitly states that the Supreme Deity in the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the very Brahman of the Upaniṣads, cannot be attained by any other means than *ananya-bhakti*³.

But according to some Upaniṣads, *ñāna* which is also termed as *Vedana* is the direct means to Brahman. Thus states the Mundaka Upaniṣad: *Brahma-veda brahmaiva bhavati* – “he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman”. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad explicitly states that other than the knowledge of Brahman, there is no other means of escape from human bondage. Thus it says: *tamevam viditva atimṛtyum eti, na anyah panthā vidyate ayanāya*. On the authority of these Upaniṣadic teachings, Samkara maintains the theory that only by means of knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Goal is to be attained. The *ñāna* or the knowledge conceived as the means (*upāya*) does not refer to mere verbal knowledge derived from the study of scriptural texts (*śravaṇa*), the reflection over what is studied to gain conviction (*manana*) and meditation on the truth (*nididhyāsana*), but the intuitional knowledge (*aparokṣa-ñāna*) in the form of the realization of the identity of *jīvātman* and Brahman (*atmaikya-ñāna*). In view of this Samkara admits that the *ñāna*-yoga taught in the Bhagavad-gītā is itself the direct means to the Supreme Goal. The term *Vidyā* employed by Bādarāyaṇa as the direct means to *mokṣa*⁴ is interpreted by Samkara to mean that only through *atmaikya-ñāna*, the Supreme Goal (*puruṣārtha*) is attained.

There are also several Upaniṣadic texts which affirm that *upāsana*, also termed as *dhyāna* and *nididhyāsana* which means unceasing meditation on Brahman is the direct means to the attainment of Brahman. The scriptural injunctions such as *upāsita, dhyaṇīta, nididhyāsita* etc. refer to the observation of meditation on Brahman

³ Bg. XI-53 and 54. *nā'ham vedair na tapasā na dānena no ce'jyayā sakha evamvidho draṣṭum drṣṭavān-asi mām yathā bhaktyā-tu ananyayā śakya aham evamvidho 'rjuna jñātum draṣṭum ca tattvena praveṣṭum ca parantapa*

⁴ See V.S.III-4-1 *puruṣārtho atah (vidyātah) iti bādarāyaṇah śabdāt*

as the means to the supreme goal.

How then Rāmānuja is justified in advancing the Theory

1 Bhakti-yoga as the direct *śādhana* to *mokṣa*? Further the term

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bhakti or bhakti-yoga is not mentioned in the principal Upaniṣads or the *Vedānta-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa, except in the Bhagavad-gītā and the *Vaiṣṇava purāṇas* such as Viṣṇu-purāṇa and Bhāgavata. These are some of the important issues which are to be clarified before formulating the theory of *bhakti-yoga* as *sādhana*. Besides, the *Yoga-darśana* founded by Patañjali is acknowledged as a separate school of thought, though it is closely affiliated to the Sāṅkhya *darśana*, which has developed in addition to the metaphysical doctrines, the details of the religio-spiritual discipline under the name of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* or eight-fold discipline as *upāya* for the attainment of a spiritual goal. Though the *Yoga-darśana* is rejected by Bādarāyaṇa as far as its philosophical doctrines are concerned, the *yoga-sādhana* in the form of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is generally acceptable to him since some of the *yogāṅgas* are referred to in the *Vedānta-sūtra*, while describing the components of *upāsana*. Rāmānuja was therefore required to synthesize all these points in formulating *bhakti-yoga* as the direct *sādhana* to *mokṣa*.

Rāmānuja is aware that the term '*bhakti*' is not mentioned in the Upaniṣads. Nevertheless he points out that the concept of *bhakti* is implicit in the Upaniṣadic texts teaching the nature of *sādhana* for *mokṣa*. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad and also the Katha Upaniṣad make a significant statement describing how *Paramātmān* (Brahman) is attained by an aspirant ^{to} *mokṣa*. Thus it states: '*nā'yam ātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena; yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ; tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛnute tanūm svām*'⁵. It means – "This self (Brahman) cannot be attained by the study of Vedas, nor by meditation, nor through much hearing. He is to be attained only by one ^{whom} the Self (*Paramātmān*) chooses. To such a person the Self (*Paramātmān*) reveals ^{his} ~~its~~ true nature". This statement does not refer directly to a specific *sādhana* to be pursued by an individual seeking to realize God, apart from the grace of God. Prima facie it appears to contradict the following statement of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad enjoining the observance of a *sādhana* for realizing *Ātman* (Brahman): "*Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ, śrotavyo, mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ*"⁶. It means – "It is the *Ātman* (*Paramātmān*) who is to be seen (realized), to be heard, to be reflected on and meditated upon". Without entering into the discussion of the different interpretations of this text by the commentators, it may be noted that this significant teaching imparted by sage Yajñavalkya to Maitreyī, wife of Yajñavalkya, seeking to know how to achieve immortality

⁵ Mund Up. III-2-3. See also Katha. Up. I-2-23

⁶ Br. Up. II-4-5

(*amṛtatva*), ^{mentions} lists the various steps to be undertaken for attaining Brahman viz. *śravaṇa* or learning from a qualified preceptor about philosophical truths, *manana* or reflection over what is learnt to gain conviction and *nididhyāsana* or the constant unceasing meditation on the Reality culminating in the *darśana* or direct intuition (*sākṣātkāra*) of the *Ātman*. Thus there is apparent conflict between the two texts – the statement of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* enjoining the observance of *nididhyāsana* and the statement of the *Muṇḍaka* regarding the futility of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and meditation to attain *Ātman*. But the Upaniṣads being the Revealed Scripture, cannot present two conflicting teachings. Such apparent conflicts need to be overcome by adopting the principles of interpretation provided by the *Mīmāṃsakas*.

According to the rules of interpretation, the statement of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* is treated as a *viśiṣṭa-vidhi* or as an injunction with specific qualification. Its implication, as explained by *Rāmānuja*, is that mere *śravaṇa* (hearing), mere *manana* (reflection) and mere *nididhyāsana* (meditation) undertaken without intense love for *Paramātmān* cannot serve as a means to attain God. Only that individual on whom God showers His grace (*yamaiva eṣa vṛṇute*), he alone can achieve Him (*tena labhyaḥ*). The question then arises: Whom God chooses to receive His grace? The answer, according to *Rāmānuja*, is that the person who is dearest to God, is chosen by Him (*priyatama eva hi varaṇīyo bhavati*)⁷. Otherwise the dispensation of grace would be arbitrary and God would be subject to partiality and cruelty (*vaiṣamyā nairghaṇya doṣa*). Who is then the dearest to God? The answer to this, as pointed out in the *Gītā* is, he who craves to have eternal union with God and meditates on Him with devotion is the dearest to God (*atyanta priya*) and to such a person He bestows divine vision.

In offering this explanation *Rāmānuja* seeks the support of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The following verse of the *Bhagavad-gītā* elucidates the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*.

*Na'ham vedair na tapasā na dānena na ce'jyayā
śakya evaḥim-vidho draṣṭum draṣṭavān aś mām yathā
Bhaktiyā tu ananyayā śakya aham evovidho' rjuna
Jñātum draṣṭum ca tattvena praveṣṭum ca parantapa*⁸

⁷ See RB I-1-1, the section dealing with *Yaghu Siddhānta*

⁸ See Bg. XI – 53 and 54

“I cannot be seen in the form you have seen me now either by the Vedas, or by austerities or by gifts or by sacrifices. But by unswerving (single-minded) devotion to me, O Arjuna, I can thus be truly known, truly seen and entered into (attained).”

The first verse points out that by mere study of the sacred texts it is not possible to know *Paramātmān* fully. Nor is it possible to know Him fully through the performance of *yāga* or sacrifices and other austerities (*tapas*) and also offering gifts. That is, none of these acts devoid of *bhakti* towards *Paramātmān*, serves the purpose of knowing Him in His true form with His full glory.

In what other way can He be known? The second verse of the *Ġitā* answers this. It is only through the means of *ananya-bhakti* towards *Paramātmān* that it is possible to know Him fully in all His aspects. *Ananya-bhakti* is needed not only for knowing *Paramātmān* (*jñātum*) in His full form, but also for obtaining His full vision (*draṣṭum*) and also to attain Him (*praveṣṭum*). These are the three stages – a) Full knowledge b) vision and c) attainment in *mokṣa* and all the three are possible only by *ananya-bhakti*. Thus it may be observed that the concept of *bhakti* or *bhakti-yoga* as the direct means of attainment of *Paramātmān* is implicit in the Upaniṣadic text enjoining meditation (*nididhyāṣana*), but it is made explicit in the verses of the *Ġitā*.

Further the word *bhakti* bears the same meaning as *nididhyāṣana* or meditation mentioned in the Upaniṣads. The word *bhakti* is derived from the root ‘*bhaj*’ which means *sevā* or meditation (*bhaj sevāyām*). According to the *Nighantu* (glossary of Vedic terms), the terms *sevā*, *bhakti* and *upāsti* bear the same meaning⁹. The term *sevā* is therefore taken to mean ‘*bhakti*’. In common usage *bhakti* is understood as love towards the respected or elderly person (*mahānīya viṣaye prītiḥ*), as compared to love towards a child. *Prīti* or love is a state of knowledge, a mental disposition. *Bhakti* therefore means unceasing meditation with intense love towards the Supreme Being (*sneha-pūrvam-anudhyānam*)¹⁰.

⁹ See *Śrutapraśikā*, commentary on Rāmānuja Bhāṣya on VS I-1-1 ‘*sevā bhaktir upāsti iti naighantukāḥ*’

¹⁰ Ibid: *sneha pūrvam-anudhyānam bhaktirity-abhidhiyate*

The general concept of *bhakti* in the sense of devotion or reverence to a Deity is accepted by all religions. This kind of *bhakti* of a general character is not regarded by Rāmānuja as the direct means to *mokṣa*. As will be explained later, *bhakti* as *upāya* or *sādhana* for *mokṣa* refers to the rigorous religio-spiritual discipline to be undertaken by a qualified aspirant for *mokṣa* and it is to be pursued continuously for the life time until the total liberation from bondage is secured. The more appropriate term for *bhakti* as *upāya* is *bhakti-yoga* as outlined in the Bhagavad-gītā. In fact, the central doctrine of the Bhagavad-gītā, according to Rāmānuja, is the advocacy of *bhakti-yoga* as the direct means of attainment of the Supreme Goal. Thus in a characteristic way, he states in the preface to his *Gītā-bhāṣya* that Lord Kṛṣṇa, under the pretext of persuading Arjuna to fight the war, introduced *bhakti-yoga*, as aided by *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, which is enjoined in the Upaniṣads as the direct means to the Supreme Goal¹¹.

In the Upaniṣadic parlance, this *bhakti-yoga* is termed as *upāsana*. Bādarāyaṇa employs the term *Vidyā* to denote *upāsana* as the means to the Supreme Goal.

As will be explained later while dealing with the nature of *sādhana*, this *bhakti-yoga* or *upāsana* on Brahman, referred to in the Upaniṣads and the *Vedānta-sūtra* involves not merely *bhakti* towards God in a general sense as commonly understood, but a rigorous religio-spiritual discipline including *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* enunciated in the Yoga system. It should also be preceded by the acquisition of philosophic knowledge of *jīvātman* and *Paramātman*, the strict performance of prescribed rituals without any selfish motive, purely as Divine service and also meditation on the *jīvātman* (*jñāna-yoga*), as outlined in the Gītā.

-Yoga as *upāya* or the means to *mokṣa* in the *Vīśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* and *Vaiṣṇavism* expounded by Rāmānuja refers to such a religio-spiritual discipline.

Before we discuss the details regarding the nature of the *sādhana* in *Vaiṣṇavism*, Rāmānuja examines the issue whether *jñāna*, also termed *vedana* and *darśana* is a direct means to the Supreme Goal, as claimed by Śaṅkara and if so, what is its relation to *bhakti-yoga* as enunciated in the Gītā?. This is an important controversial issue in

¹¹ See RB on B.G, preface. *Pāṇḍu-tanaya yuddha prōṣāhana vyājena paramapurūṣārtha-lakṣaṇa sādhanatayā vedāntoditam svavīśayam jñāna-karma anugrahītam bhakti-yogam avatārayāmāsa.*

Vedānta and it needs to be clarified to understand the theory of Rāmānuja on the subject of yoga.

As pointed out earlier, the Upaniṣadic texts mention that *veda* or *vedana* meaning knowledge of Brahman, is the direct means to realize Brahman. Thus states the Svetāśvatara: 'tamevam vjditvā mṛtyum atyeti, nā'nyaḥ panthā ayanāya vidyate'. The Taittiriya says: 'Brahmavidā param āpnoti'. On the basis of such texts Saṅkara maintains that *jñāna* is the direct means for the attainment of Brahman. The *Vedānta-sūtra* also ^{u. 5. 5} ~~uses~~ the expression 'vidyā' derived from the root word 'vid' or 'to know'. *Vidyā* is interpreted by Saṅkara as 'ātmaikya-jñāna' in accordance with these Upaniṣadic texts. The *upāsana*, *dhyāna*, *nididhyāsana* etc. which mean meditation on Brahman, is taken as subsidiary means to *bhakti-yoga*, referred to in the *Gītā*.

Rāmānuja does not question the basic teaching of the Upaniṣad that *jñāna* is the means to *mokṣa*. The issue which he raises is: What is the kind of knowledge that serves as the means to *mokṣa*? Is it the knowledge of Brahman as generated by the Upaniṣadic texts or is it *jñāna* in some other form? The first kind of *jñāna* is known as *vākyārtha-jñāna* or the knowledge which arises from the study of the Upaniṣads which teach the identity of Brahman with the individual self, as conceived by the Advaita Vedānta, on the basis of the premise that *jīvātman* is identical with Brahman. But such a verbal knowledge derived from the study of the sacred texts is not found to remove the bondage.

To meet this objection a modified view is presented by the Advaitin. It is not mere verbal knowledge which is mediate in character (*parokṣa*) that removes bondage, but on the contrary, a kind of intensive knowledge of immediate character (*aparokṣa-jñāna*) generated by constant meditation, culminating in the direct realization of the identity of the individual self with Brahman (*ātmaikya-jñāna*) that serves as the means to the liberation from bondage. This view is also rejected by Rāmānuja as untenable ~~on the~~ ^{on the} ~~basis of detailed critical examination of all arguments advanced by Saṅkara in defence~~ ^{of this theory}¹².

After a critical analysis of the theory advanced by Saṅkara, Rāmānuja comes to the conclusion that *jñāna* or knowledge of Brahman referred to in the Upaniṣads as the

¹² See RB. I-1-1, section on *laghustiddhānta* for details.

basis of detailed critical examination of all arguments advanced by Śaṅkara in defence of this theory¹².

After a critical analysis of the theory advanced by Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja comes to the conclusion that *jñāna* or knowledge of Brahman referred to in the Upaniṣads as the means to *mokṣa* should develop itself into steadfast meditation or *bhakti* (*bhakti-rūpāpanna jñāna*). This explanation has the full support of the Upaniṣadic teachings. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad states: 'tamevaṁ dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta'. It means that only after knowing Brahman (by means of study of the Śrīscripture and reflection thereon), the *upāsana* is to be performed¹³. The Chāndogya text says: 'yastam ātmānan anuvidya vijānāti'¹⁴. It means that after one has known the true nature of *Ātman* (Brahman), one practices meditation. The Brhadāraṇyaka enjoins more specifically: 'Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyah, śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsavyah'¹⁵. This significant teaching made by sage Yājñavalkya to Maitreyī to teach the ways and means of attaining immortality (*amṛta*) sums up the nature of the *sādhana* to be pursued for attaining *mokṣa*. As interpreted by Rāmānuja, it enjoins *nididhyāsana* or meditation on *Ātman* (Brahman) preceded by *śravaṇa* (learning from sacred texts) and *manana* (reflection on what is taught) and *nididhyāsana* or unceasing meditation on Brahman, culminating in *darśana* or the vivid vision of Brahman almost similar to the visual perception of an object (*darśana-samānākaratā*). According to Rāmānuja, *darśana* referred to in the text is not the goal in the form of actual realization of Brahman, as some commentators interpret, but it is a perfected state of meditation (*nididhyāsana*) and not the actual direct vision of Brahman which is possible only after one has been totally disembodied from bondage and attained the higher abode of Viṣṇu (*paramapada*). *Darśana* is therefore a specific term used for *nididhyāsana*, which is a general term. As will be explained presently, the terms *darśana*, *jñāna*, *vedana* bear the same meaning as the terms such as *nididhyāsana*, *dhyāna*, *dhruvā-smṛti* employed in the Upaniṣads. These are synonymous terms. Otherwise, it would amount to the admission of different paths to *mokṣa*. But as the goal is the same viz. attainment of Brahman, all these paths cannot be different. Nor can they be taken as alternative paths. Taking the instance of *darśana* and *nididhyāsana*, *darśana* in the form of direct vision of Brahman is an easier method,

¹² See RB. I-1-1, section on *Laghusiddhānta* for details

¹³ Br. Up. IV-4-21 *tamevam dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta*. *Prajñāṁ* means *upāsana*.

¹⁴ Ch. Up. VIII-12-6

¹⁵ Br. Up. VI-5-6

whereas nīdīdhyāna is a rigorous method to be pursued for a long time. These two cannot be taken as alternative paths (vikalpa) for attaining the same goal. Hence darśana and nīdīdhyāna are not different means to mokṣa.
// This view is supported by the fact that the very Upaniṣadic texts dealing with the upāya to mokṣa, employ the terms darśana and upāsanā as interchangeable words in one and the same passage. Thus, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad discussing the manner of doing upāsanā on Brahman, the passage commences with the statement 'mano brahmeti upāsita'¹⁶ which means 'Brahman is to be contemplated as manas', by using the term 'upāsita'. While concluding this passage, it is stated: 'ya evam veda'¹⁷ meaning 'he who knows thus'. The term veda is used here in place of upāsanā mentioned at the commencement. Taking into consideration the context of the passage, veda at the concluding statement means the same as upāsanā used in the beginning. In another passage of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad referring to the greatness of Raikva, the opening sentence states: 'yastat veda tat sa veda'¹⁸ meaning 'what Raikva knows that is to be known' etc. While concluding this narration it is stated: "Whatever devatā you contemplate (tvam upāste)"¹⁹, tell me in detail about the same deity". In this passage, unlike the previous one, the term veda is used at the beginning and the word upāste is used at the end. If we take into consideration both these passages, it is obvious that according to the Upaniṣads, vedana and upāsanā bear the same meaning. Otherwise it would amount to the admission of two different means for mokṣa and it is unlikely that the Upaniṣads prescribe two different means for attaining the same goal.

Further, according to Rāmānuja, the different terms used in the Upaniṣads such as upāsanā, dhyāna, smṛti-santati, vedana and darśana are to be taken to mean the same as bhakti referred to in the Gītā and implied in the text of the Muṇḍaka as pointed out earlier. The main reason for this conclusion is that if these terms are understood differently, it would amount to the admission of several means (upāyas) to mokṣa. Since the goal to be achieved is the same, the means cannot be different. It should therefore be admitted that all these terms bear the same import. According to the principle of interpretation laid down by the Mīmāṃsakas, when different terms are used in the same context, the general term should be taken to bear the meaning of the specific term. Accordingly, in the present jñāna, darśana, vedana, dhyāna, upāsanā, dhruvā-smṛti which are employed in the Upaniṣads as upāya for mokṣa, are treated as general terms whereas bhakti mentioned in the Bhagavad-gītā as upāya for mokṣa is taken as a

¹⁶ Ch. Up. III-18

¹⁷ Ch. Up. III-18

¹⁸ Ch. Up. IV-1-4

¹⁹ Ch. Up. IV-2-2

specific term meaning unswerving devotion to God. The term *bhakti*, according to the etymological meaning (*bhaj sevāyām*) is the same as *upāsana*. As already observed *upāsana* and *vedana* are employed as interchangeable words in the Upaniṣads. Taking all these facts into consideration, Rāmānuja comes to the conclusion that *bhakti-yoga* as the spiritual discipline is the *upāya* to *mokṣa* and that this view is in consonance with the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the *Vedānta-sūtra*.

Nature of bhakti-yoga

What is the nature of *bhakti-yoga* which is advocated in the Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja as the direct *upāya* to *mokṣa*? The principal Upaniṣads which generally speak of several *Brahma-vidyās* or *upāsana* of different types do not throw much light on the method of practicing *upāsana* except certain general characteristics of it. Nor does the *Vedānta-sūtra*, which accords such an important place to it, (The major part of the third *adhya* being titled *sādhana*) ^{does not} present a comprehensive and consolidated account of its practice step-by-step, as the *Yoga-sūtras* of Patañjali describe the eight limbs of yoga. Though the later religious literature such as the *Itihasas* and *Puranas* with the exception of the *Bhagavad-gītā* commend the practice of *bhakti-yoga* and other forms of yoga, they do not provide us a practical guide to the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. The only important *Vedānta* treatise which deals in detail with the *bhakti-yoga* is the *Bhagavad-gītā*. ~~What~~ ^{therefore,} Ramanuja, in his introduction to the *Gītā-bhāṣya* openly states that the *Gītā* is primarily intended to teach *bhakti-yoga*. In a characteristic way he says: "The Supreme Being, out of compassion towards humanity, incarnated Himself as Lord Kṛṣṇa and under the pretext of inducing Arjuna to fight the war, taught *bhakti-yoga* aided by *jñāna* and *karma* which is enjoined in the Upaniṣads as the direct means to *mokṣa*, the highest Goal of human endeavor"²⁰. The words '*vedāntoditam...bhakti-yogam*' in this statement clearly establishes that *bhakti-yoga* taught in the *Gītā* as direct *sādhana* is in accordance with the teachings of the Upaniṣads. He is therefore fully justified in advocating the doctrine of *bhakti-yoga* as the direct means to *mokṣa* and also incorporating all the details furnished in the *Gītā* about yoga as *sādhana* along with whatever material is available in the *Vedānta-sūtra*.

²⁰ See fn. 11

advocating the doctrine of *bhakti-yoga* as the direct means to *mokṣa* and also incorporating all the details furnished in the *Gītā* about *yoga* as *sādhana* along with whatever material is available in the *Vedānta-sūtra*.

Though *yoga* as a *darśana* or philosophical system is rejected by *Bādarāyaṇa* and also by the commentators on the *Vedānta-sūtra* in so far as its philosophical doctrines are concerned, the religio-spiritual discipline under the name of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is accepted by him with some modification. Thus the *Vedānta-sūtras*, while discussing the nature and components of *vidyā* or *upāsana*, which according to *Bādarāyaṇa* is the direct means to the *Parama-puruṣārtha*, mention *dhyāna*, the sixth limb of *yogāṅgas*, *āsana* or steady posture, *dhāraṇa* or concentration of the mind on the object of contemplation, *yama* or cultivation of ethical values and *niyama* or scrupulous observance of prescribed rituals. The *Bhagavad-gītā* in the sixth *adhyāya*, which deals with *jñāna-yoga*, according to *Rāmānuja*, for realizing the *jīvatman* (*ātmāvalokana*), also refers specifically to a few important limbs of the *yoga*. *Rāmānuja* therefore acknowledges the need of the *yogāṅgas* laid down by *Patañjali* in formulating the theory of *bhakti-yoga* as the direct *sādhana* to *mokṣa*. While commenting on the *Vedānta-sūtra* which define the nature of *dhyāna* he quotes the following verse from the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*: '*tadrūpa-pratyaye ca ekā santatisca ^{anya-}nisprhā; tad-dhyānam prathamaiḥ aṅgaiḥ ṣaḍbhiḥ niṣpādyate nṛpa*'²¹. It means that the continuous unbroken series of meditation on Brahman is called *dhyāna* and that is to be accomplished by the first six *yogāṅgas* viz. *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇa*.

Though *Rāmānuja* acknowledges the need of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* of *Patañjali* as referred to in the *Vedānta-sūtra* and also *Bhagavad-gītā*, the nature of *bhakti-yoga* as the direct *sādhana* to the attainment of *Paramātman* is much more than what is enunciated in the *Patañjala-yoga* system. The *bhakti-yoga* advocated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* which is accepted by *Rāmānuja* as the direct *sādhana*, unlike *Śaṅkara*, includes many other features. The first and most important point of difference is that the goal of *Patañjala-yoga* is *kaivalya* or the attainment of a state of existence by the individual self as totally free from the association of *citta* and its *vṛttis* or functions. The very second *sūtra* of *Patañjali* which defines the term *yoga* as *cittavṛtti-nirodhaḥ* is followed by the *sūtra* reading as: '*tadā drastuh svarūpe avasthānam*', implying that the goal of *yoga* practice is

²¹ V.P..VI - 7 - 91

the state of existence of *jīvatman* in its pure form as totally devoid of all influences of *citta*.

The goal of *bhakti-yoga* as stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* is the attainment of *Paramātman* by the individual self. Accordingly, the practice of *bhakti* or *bhakti-yoga* covers many other factors. Though the *adhyaayas* 7 to 12 are stated to deal with *bhakti-yoga*, according to Rāmānuja, there is only one verse in the 9th *adhyaaya* which describes the *svarūpa* or essential features of *bhakti-yoga*. The relevant verse reads: '*manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru; māmevaiśyasi yuktvaivam-ātmānam matparāyaṇam*'²². The meaning of this verse as explained by Rāmānuja is: *manmanā bhava* means that the devotee should focus his mind on *Paramātman*. *Manana* denotes *dhyāna*, also named as *nididhyāsana* or *upāsariā* or *dhruvāsmṛti* in the Upaniṣads, which means unceasing meditation on *Paramātman* who is the Supreme Brahman, who is the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, who is endowed with infinite auspicious attributes, free from all defilements and who possesses a divine body. The meditation is to be practised with devotion (*madbhakta*). *Madyājī bhava* means the devotee should become engaged in the worship of God. The root word 'yaj' means *pūja* or worship and in the present context it refers to the various modes of worship of God as laid down in the *Pāñcarātra* treatises (*bhagavadārādhana*). This again is to be performed with love towards God. *Māṁ namaskuru* means to bow down or prostrate with humility to God by regarding Him as the Supreme Being and the *jīvatman* as a humble being solely dependent on Him (*seṣa*). *Matparāyaṇa* means to regard *Paramātman* alone as the Supreme Goal. *Ātmānam yuktva* means that in this manner the mind is to be disciplined towards God as the Supreme object of attainment. *Ātman* in this context means mind and not Self as Śaṅkara conceives. *Māmevaiśyasi* means that with such a practice of *bhakti-yoga* one will surely attain only *Paramātman*. This explanation which is in consonance with the teachings of the *Gītā* establishes that *bhakti-yoga* is the direct means to *Paramātman*. This verse refers to three significant concepts viz. *manana* with *bhakti*, *yajana* with *bhakti* and *namaskāra* with *bhakti*. The fuller implications of these three terms as explained by Rāmānuja and further elucidated by Vedānta Deśika, an illustrious successor to Ramanuja, in his *Tātparya-candrikā* (a commentary on Rāmānuja *Bhāṣya*) will fully bring out the nature of *bhakti-yoga*.

²² B.G. IX-34.

Dhyāna denoted by the word *manana* does not mean mere meditation on an object as it is ordinarily understood. In the initial stage, the mind is to be focused on the object of contemplation which in the yoga system is called *dhāraṇa*. *Dhyāna* follows *dhāraṇa*. It signifies a constant and continuous reflection on the divine form with all its glory. To be more specific, it means, as Rāmānuja explains, reflection on the *svarūpa* or the essential nature, *rūpa* or the divine personality and *guṇa* or the auspicious attributes of Brahman. The various *upāsānās* or *vidyās* such as *Sad-vidyā*, *Dahara-vidyā*, *Ānanda-vidyā*, *Upakosala-vidyā* etc enjoined in the Upaniṣads prescribe the different types of meditation on Brahman as qualified with specific attributes. All these spiritual endeavours involve a conscious effort to think of all the glory of God not for a short period but continuously and repeatedly until such time as the goal is achieved. The flow of thought towards God should be like an unbroken stream of oil poured from a vessel (*ailadhārāvad-avacchinna smṛti-santati-rūpam*²³). This is what is intended in the expression *dhruvā-smṛtiḥ* used in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad for *dhyāna* or *upāsānā*. The same truth is reiterated by the *Vedānta-sūtra* when it states that meditation is to be repeated often²⁴. This is to be done, as already pointed out, with deep devotion towards God.

According to Rāmānuja, *dhyāna* also implies the entire eight-fold discipline known as *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* of Yoga system. Though the term '*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*' is not explicitly mentioned either in the *Vedānta-sūtra* or the *Bhagavad-gītā*, it is implicit in the teachings offered in these texts about the methodology and the components prescribed for the practice of *dhyāna* or *dhyāna-yoga*. In the sixth chapter of the *Gītā* dealing with the *jñāna-yoga*, also named as *dhyāna-yoga* and also in the third *adhyāya* of the *Vedānta-sūtra* dealing with the method of observing *upāsānā*, some of the *yogāṅgas* such as steady posture (*āsana*), *prāṇāyāma*, control of the senses for gaining concentration of the mind, are referred to. As stated earlier, Rāmānuja openly admits the need of *aṣṭāṅgas* for successful practice of *dhyāna* leading to the attainment of the Spiritual Goal. ^{As pointed out earlier,} This is evident from the fact that Rāmānuja, while commentating on the sūtras dealing with *dhyāna*, quotes a statement from *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* which explicitly mentions ~~that *dhyāna* is to be accomplished with the aid of the first six *yogāṅgas* (*dhyānam*~~

²³ See RB. I-1-1

²⁴ See VS IV-1-1 *āvṛtīḥ asakṛdupadēsāt*

that *dhyāna* is to be accomplished with the aid of the first six *yogāṅgas* (*dhyānam prathamair-āṅgaiḥ ṣaḍbhiḥ niṣpādyate*²⁵). It is therefore obvious that prior to embarking on *dhyāna*, what is needed is the *dhāraṇa* or concentration of the mind on the object of contemplation. This is the sixth limb of the *yoga* discipline. *Dhāraṇa* in turn presupposes invariably, mental purity by way of cultivation of ethical virtues (*yamas*), observation of prescribed religious duties (*niyamas*), a steady posture (*āsana*), control of breath (*prāṇāyama*), ^{and} control of the sense organs (*pratyāhāra*). It is only such a discipline with all the requisites when perfected ^{over} a long period of practice that culminates in the actual realization or the direct vision of the object of contemplation. This final stage of *yoga* practice is known as *Samādhi* in the *Yoga* system leading to the state of *kaivalya* or the realization of the individual self in its purest form. But in *Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta*, the final stage of *bhakti-yoga* culminates in the *Paramātma-sākṣatkāra* or the comprehensive vivid vision of *Paramātman* leading to *mokṣa* or the final liberation of the individual self from bondage.

Though *bhakti-yoga* covers *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* of Patañjali, its scope is far wider and more comprehensive than Pātañjala *yoga sādhana*.

The *yamas* and *niyamas* referred to in the *yoga-sūtra* is of a general nature and these ethical virtues and religious observances are common features of all the spiritual discipline laid down by other schools of thought including Buddhism and Jainism. More than these general ethical and religious principles, the Upaniṣads and Bhagavad-gītā have laid down other requirements to be fulfilled as aids to *bhakti-yoga* mainly intended for the realization of the Supreme Spiritual Goal. On the authority of an ancient commentator on the *Vedānta-sūtra* known as Vākyakāra, Ramanuja prescribes a seven-fold ethical discipline named *sādhana-saptaka* as an essential requirement for the successful practice of *bhakti-yoga*²⁶. These are 1) *viveka* or the purification of the body by consumption of *sattvik* food which promotes purity of the mind, as stated in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad²⁷. 2) *vimoka* or getting rid of sensual attachment and anger for securing mental tranquility. 3) *abhyāsa* or repeated reflection on God who is

²⁵ V.P. VI-7-91. *tadrūpa pratyāçāikā santatiśca anyanisprahāḥ; tad-dhyānam prathamair āṅgaiḥ ṣaḍbhiḥ niṣpādyate nrpa...*

²⁶ See RB I-1-1 *tallabdhir- viveka-vimoka-abhyāsa-kriyā-kalyāṇa-anavaśāda-anuddharṣebhyah sambhavāt*

²⁷ Br. Up *āhāraśuddhau sattvaśuddhiḥ*

immanent in human souls. 4) *kriyā* or the performance of five-fold religious duty which will provide inner mental strength. 5) *kalyāṇa* or development of ethical virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion, benevolence, non-violence etc which will give inner purity. 6) *anavaśāda* or freedom from despair due to disappointments and unexpected calamities. 7) *anuddharṣa* or not to be overpowered by excessive joy so that tranquility of the mind is not disturbed.

The *Vedānta-sūtra*, based on the text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* also refers to the need of the development of virtues as an aid to *upāsana*, such as *śama* or calmness, *dama* or control of senses, *uparati* or inner satisfaction, *titikṣu* or patience and *samāhitatva* or equanimity²⁸.

In addition to the ethical discipline, the *upāsaka* embarking on *bhakti-yoga* is required to perform without fail, all the *nitya* and *naimittika* karmas or the religious duties laid down as obligatory by the sacred texts purely for the pleasure of God. As taught in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, he should also observe *karma-yoga* or the performance of prescribed religious acts without any attachment to the deeds and also to the results accruing from it, purely as a divine service for the pleasure of God. On the strength of these teachings of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*, *Rāmānuja* emphasizes that under no circumstances the *upāsaka* should give up the performance of prescribed religious duties and that these have to be observed for the lifetime until the *upāsana* is successfully completed, until the attainment of the Supreme Goal.

Thus *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* taught in the *Bhagavad-gītā* become an essential *aṅga* or subordinate means to *bhakti-yoga*. The word *manana* or *dhyāna* stated as one of the three features of *bhakti-yoga*, covers not merely the eight-fold yoga discipline, but also the observance of *karma-yoga* and also *jñāna-yoga*.

Dhyāna, which may be appropriately termed as *dhyāna-yoga* is primarily a mental act (*mānasa*) in the form of unceasing loving meditation on *Paramātman*. The other two features of *bhakti-yoga* viz. *yajana* implied by the word *madyāji* and *namaskāra*

²⁸ V.S. III-4-27 *samadamādy-upetasyāt...*

See also Br. Up. IV-4-23 *tasmāt evam vit sānto dānta uparitaḥ titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvā*

ātmanyeva ātmanam paśyati paśyati

represent the physical (*kāyika*) and oral (*vācika*) acts. The root word 'yaj' means *pūja* or worship and in the present context it refers to all the various modes of worship of God as laid down in the *Pāñcarātra* treatises. Thus *yajana* in its broadest sense includes physical as well as oral acts such as *arcana* or worship in the form of recitation of the names of God, offering flowers, fruits and food, lighting lamps, offering incense and sandal paste. In other words, it covers, as stated by Vedānta Dēśika, the entire mode of worship prescribed by the *Pāñcarātra* treatises²⁹.

It may be noted in this connection that the different modes of worship of God mentioned in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa³⁰ such as *śravaṇa* or listening to the glory of God, *kīrtana* or singing, *smaraṇa* or contemplating His greatness, *pādasevana* or offering worship at His feet, *arcana* offering flowers with recitation of His names, *vandana* or prostrating before God, *dāsyā* or feeling utter dependence on God, *śakhyam* or loving disposition towards God and *ātma-nivedanam* or surrendering oneself to God – either singly or collectively will not constitute the direct *upāya* to *mokṣa* as believed by some of the Vaiṣṇava movements of post-Rāmānuja period. They only sub-serve *bhakti-yoga*, which as a rigorous religio-spiritual discipline, is the direct means (*upāya*) to *mokṣa*. Thus, according to Rāmānuja, *yoga* in the sense of *upāya*, which is of the nature of *bhakti-yoga*, also named as *upāsanā*, *nididhyaśana*, *dhyāna* and *vidyā* is not a simple meditation on the ^{of vātman} inner self or God, as propagated widely all over the world by several religious modern movements. But on the contrary, it is a rigorous multi-form ethical, religious and spiritual discipline to be undertaken by a spiritual aspirant and continued over a long time for the purpose of attaining God.

According to the teachings of the Bhagavad-gīta, *bhakti-yoga* can also serve as a means to ^{the} attainment of other goals such as *aīśvarya* or worldly prosperity, *kaivalya* or the state of blissful existence of the self and *artha* or wealth. Accordingly the *upāsakas* or those who adopt the pathway of *bhakti*, are classified into four groups³¹: *Ārti* or the one who aspires for recovery of the lost wealth, *jijñāsu* or the one who desires to attain the blissful state of one's self, *arthārthi* or the one who wishes to acquire material wealth and *jñānī* or the one who craves to attain God. Of all these, *jñānī* is held in high esteem because

²⁹ See Tatparya-candrika on RB IX-34. *bhagavat-sastradi prapancita viṣayo 'yam yajir-iti.*

³⁰ Bhagavata VII-5-23

³¹ V.S. III-3-56 ~~nana sabdadibhedat.~~ B.G., VII-16.
See also V.S. III-3-1

he is the one who does meditation without any selfish purpose exclusively for attaining God. As stated in the *Ġitā*, he is regarded by God as His dearest (*atyartha-priyaḥ*). The *bhakti-yoga*, which we outlined in foregoing pages, as the direct means to *mokṣa*, is the best one. The thirty two *vidyas* or *upasanās* mentioned in the Upanisads are of the same nature as *bhakti-yoga* outlined in the *Ġitā*, though they are named differently because of the differences in the description of the object of contemplation viz. Brahman in terms of its attributes as stated in the *Vedānta-sūtra*³². Thus for instance, the *upāsanā* on Brahman ^{as} *sat* or the ground of the entire universe is named '*sad-vidyā*'. The *upāsanā* on Brahman as an indweller in the inner recess of the heart (*dahara-ākāśa* or subtle space) is known as *dahara-vidyā*. As the goal of these *upāsanās* is the same, viz. the attainment of *mokṣa*, they are regarded as alternative means (*vikalpa*) as explained in the *Vedānta-sūtra*³³. In all these cases the mode of meditation along with the various ethical and religious requirements explained earlier in connection with *bhakti-yoga*, remains the same.

This is indeed an arduous pathway to *mokṣa*. It is beset with innumerable difficulties and hardships and it is almost impossible in the present epoch for anyone to pursue the *bhakti-yoga*. Even the most competent person like Arjuna who was fully instructed by a person no less than the very God-incarnate, expressed grief towards the end indicating his incapability for the observance of *bhakti-yoga*. At this stage, the benevolent Lord Kṛṣṇa, out of compassion and friendly disposition towards Arjuna comes out with the advice to adopt the method of absolute surrender as an easier and alternative pathway to *mokṣa*. This is the doctrine of *Śaraṅāgati* or *Prapatti*. The Vaiṣṇavism as expounded by Rāmānuja has adopted this important doctrine. This is also regarded as *yoga* since it is an *upāya* or means to *mokṣa*. It is essentially an ethico-religious discipline comprising six components and hence called *ṣaḍāṅga-yoga* analogous to *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* or the eight-fold discipline of the Yoga system. Though the concept of *Śaraṅāgati* is acceptable to all religious schools, its development as an alternative direct means (*upāya*) to *mokṣa* is unique to Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja. It is therefore important that we include a brief outline of this distinctive doctrine of yoga in this chapter.

³² ~~1000~~ vs. III-3-56. *nānā śabdādi bhedaḥ*. See also vs. III-3-1.
³³ V.S III-3-57 *vikalpo aviśiṣṭa-phalatvāt*

The Doctrine of Śadaṅga-yoga or Śaraṅgati

According to the *Pancaratra* treatises, which constitute one of the important sources of authority for Vaiṣṇavism, there are only two ways to attain *mokṣa*. It is either *bhakti-yoga* or *prapatti-yoga*. Thus it is stated in the *Pāñcarātra samhitā*³⁴: *bhaktyā paramayā vā'pi prapattiyā vā mahāmate; prāpyo'ham nā'nyathā prāpyo mama kaiṅkarya lipsubhih'* – “There are only two ways, either through the means of *parama-bhakti* or *prapatti*, that I can be attained by those who crave to do divine service to Me. There is no other way”. Both are important means for *mokṣa* and have been advocated as alternative methods intended for two different categories of individuals having different capacities and conditions of eligibility. The Upaniṣads and the *Vedānta-sūtra* have given greater emphasis to *bhakti-yoga*, also known as *upāsana*, whereas the Vaiṣṇava treatises have accorded greater prominence to *prapatti*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* has provided details of *bhakti-yoga* and also briefly mentioned *śaraṅgati* in a single verse in the concluding portion of the last *adhyāya*. But the details of the *prapatti-yoga*, which is more relevant to the present age because of its easy observance by those who are incapable of following any other method and who yet desperately crave for the attainment of God, are developed in the *Pāñcarātra* treatises ^{and} by the mystic saints of South India who have themselves adopted this method ^{also} and in other religious treatises of Rāmānuja.

Both have been sanctioned by the *Śruti* and *Smṛti* texts. *Bhakti-yoga* which is a rigorous discipline, is restricted to certain class of individuals. On the other hand, *prapatti* is recommended as an easier path intended for all, without any restriction of caste, creed and status of the individuals. In view of this, the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* right from the time of Nāthamuni (9th cent), have given preference to *prapatti* and advocated it as the easier means of *mokṣa*. *Prapatti* has therefore assumed great significance in Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja.

The term *prapatti* is derived from the words 'pra-pad'. 'Pad' means to move and 'pra' means in the best manner. In the context of *upāya*, the term implies total self-surrender to God as the sole refuge. A more appropriate Sanskrit term for *prapatti* is *Bharanyāsa* or *atma-niksepa*, that is, to place the burden of protection of the self in the care of God.

³⁴ Quoted by Vedānta Deśika in his *Rahasya-traya-sāra*. Chapter XXIX

It is also known as *Śaraṇāgati* or seeking God as the sole refuge, as implied in the *Gītā* verse: 'māmekam śaraṇam vraja'.

This is not the place to go into the details of this doctrine. We are only concerned here to explain how the observance of self-surrender to God is regarded as *Ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*, a six-fold yoga discipline or *upāya* to attain the Supreme Goal.

Before we outline the six components of *Śaraṇāgati*, we should take note of two important conditions of eligibility to be fulfilled by an individual who resorts to this pathway. These are *ākiñcanya* and *ananya-gatitva*. *Ākiñcanya* means absolute inability on the part of the individual to adopt any other *upaya* for *mokṣa* such as *bhakti-yoga* aided by *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, as taught in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. *Ananya-gatitva* means the deep conviction that no other person or Deity other than the Supreme Being (Viṣṇu) can protect the individual and secure *mokṣa*. Both Yāmuna and Rāmānuja have emphasized these points by imposing on themselves these qualifications, in their ardent prayer for *Śaraṇāgati*³⁵.

The six components of *Śaraṇāgati* as stated by Vedānta Deśika on the authority of the *Pāñcarātra* treatises are:

- 1) *Ānukūlya-saṅkalpa*: That is, a determined will on the part of the aspirant to perform only such acts as would please God.
- 2) *Prātikūlya-varjana*: That is, to refrain from acts which would cause displeasure to God.
- 3) *Kārpaṇya*: The feeling of humility arising from the helplessness of an individual in resorting to other means of salvation.
- 4) *Mahāviśvāsa*: The absolute and unshakable faith in God as the sole protector.
- 5) *Goptr̥va-varaṇa*: To make a request to God, seeking his protection.
- 6) *Ātma-nikṣepa*: That is, entrusting the burden of protecting the individual self to the care of God³⁶.

³⁵ See Yamuna's *Stotra-ratna* verse 22.. *akiñcano ananyagatissaraṇya, tvad-pādamūlam śaraṇam prapadye.*

See also Rāmānuja's *Śaraṇāgati-gadya*.....*anantakāla samikṣayāpy-adṛṣṭa santāropāyah*

³⁶ For details see S.M.Srinivasa Chari – *Vaiṣṇavism, its Philosophy, Theology and Religious Discipline*, Chapter 13

Each one of these constitutes an important component of *Saraṅgati* and bears far-reaching ethical and theological significance. The first two *aṅgas* have ethical significance since they involve right conduct by way of strictly obeying the commands of the Lord. The sacred texts have prescribed the religious acts to be performed by an individual and prohibited certain acts. These are like the commandments of God and by strictly following the dictum of *śāstra* one incurs the pleasure of God and ^{by} doing the prohibited acts one incurs His displeasure. An individual ^{is} ~~being~~ subservient to God ^{and hence} ~~is~~ ~~hence~~ becomes imperative for him to please God by doing the right things and avoid His displeasure by refraining from prohibited acts.

The third *aṅga kārpaṇya* or humility is an important mental trait to be developed by the aspirant for *mokṣa*. It helps to arouse the compassion of God.

The fourth *aṅga, mahāvīśvāsa* or unshakable faith in God as the only saviour is the most important part of *Saraṅgati*. Such a conviction enables an aspirant to perform *prapatti* without entertaining any doubt regarding its effectiveness to secure *mokṣa* for him.

The fifth *aṅga, goptrva-varaṇa* implies that the individual who seeks liberation should make a formal request to God to grant him *mokṣa*, following the general principle that one grants the desired object only when it is asked for.

The sixth part, *ātma-nikṣepa* or the act of surrendering the self to the care of God is the principal component of *prapatti* (*aṅgi*). It is not to be understood as handing over one's soul to the care of God like offering a commodity to another person. The individual caught up in bondage from beginning-less time (due to ignorance) had assumed that the self belongs to him and that he enjoys full freedom, thereby developing a sense of egoism. After gaining philosophic knowledge through a preceptor, regarding the true nature of *jīvatman* and its relation to *Paramātmān*, he realizes that the self belongs to *Paramātmān* and that he is solely dependent on Him, that it is the property of God and that he does not have any power or capacity to protect it. *Ātma-nikṣepa* or self-surrender is thus a specific mental state (*matī-vīśeṣa*) qualified by the three important notions a) The self is not mine, but the property of God (*svarūpa-samarpaṇa*), b) That its protection is the responsibility of God (*bhara-samarpaṇa*) and c) That the happiness derived from its protection is that of God (*phala-samarpaṇa*). Along with such a mental attitude, the

individual seeking *mokṣa* should pray to God formally requesting Him to accept the responsibility of protecting his soul. This is the implication of *atma-nikṣepa* and Vedānta Dēśika has expressed this truth in one verse: 'My self, the responsibility of protecting it, the fruit of its protection, is not mine; it is that of *Śrīpati* (God); it is in this manner that a wise person should surrender himself to God'.³⁷

There are numerous episodes in *Itihasas* and *Puranas* narrating the observance of *Śaraṇāgati* by the celestial deities (*devatas*), the sages, human beings of all kinds and even the living beings of lower kind such as animals seeking the refuge of the Almighty for securing the desired goals including *mokṣa*. The *śaraṇāgati* observed by Visbhīṣana seeking the protection of Rāma in the Ramayana is a classic example. The efficacy of *Śaraṇāgati* or *prapatti* as a means to *mokṣa* cannot be doubted if we bear in mind and also are fully convinced about the noble qualities of the Supreme Ruler and the intimate relation of *jīva* to God. God is *sarva-rakṣaka*, one who is willingly ready to redeem all *jīvas*. He is *śaraṇāgata-vatsala*, one who has natural loving disposition to those who seek His refuge. He is *sahaja-suhṛt*, friendly towards all by nature. Besides these divine qualities He is *sarvajña* (omniscient), *sarvāsaktimān* (omnipotent) and *satyasañkalpa* or one whose words of assurance to the devotee never go false. On the other hand, the individual soul belongs to *Īśvara* and by virtue of its intrinsic nature it has the potential right and capacity to enjoy the bliss of Brahman. All that stands in its way to attain the spiritual goal is the accumulated *karma* from a beginning-less time and it is to be overcome by securing the grace of God by the observance of either *upāsana* or self-surrender. If we bear in mind all these facts, there should be no room for doubt as to whether God would ever respond to our sincere and ardent prayer seeking *mokṣa*. *Prapatti-yoga*, as we have explained, is total self-surrender with an ardent prayer and with unshakable faith in God as the saviour to accept the responsibility of saving the individual self. This point has been brought out clearly in the final teaching imparted to Arjuna by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad-gītā in the following significant verse: '*sarva-dharmān parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja; aham tvā sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi māśucaḥ*'.³⁸ The implication of this verse, as correctly interpreted by the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*, is that when an aspirant for *mokṣa* is incapable of observing the path of *bhakti-yoga* along with *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, he should surrender himself to God. The all-compassionate and all-powerful God will redeem him from all the sins standing as

37. See Nyasadasaka, Verse 1.

38. Bg. XVIII - 66.

obstacles to *mokṣa*. The aspirant does not have to grieve any more with regard to the attainment of the goal.

Thus, according to the Vaiṣṇavism of Rāmānuja, yoga in the sense of *upāya* or the means to the attainment of the Supreme Spiritual Goal applies both to *bhakti-yoga* as enunciated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Upanisads* and the *Vedānta-sūtra* and also to *prapatti-yoga* as expounded in the Vaiṣṇava treatises of the Rāmānuja school.

