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Sri Ramanuja's sarira-sariri-bhava

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Abstract

Every religious system is integrated around some central principle complex though the process of integration may be. At the core of each tradition there is no doubt, an intuited vision. But the vision will invariably be articulated in some conceptual or analogical form, even when the vision itself is said to be ineffable. Thus it is possible to discover an integrating concept at the centre of each religious system. Without probing to this cohering core and analyzing its conceptual structure and significance, there can be no conceptual understanding of any religious tradition.

The central explicating analogy of Sri Ramanuja's system of Viśiṣṭadvaita is the sartra-sariri-bhava. I realize that others have argued similarly for the priority of the prakara-prakaribhava this was certainly a prominent relational category in Ramanuja's system, just as were the sesa-sest and amsa-amśi relationships. While, however, the prakara analogy signifies in a general way the utter dependence of the universe on the Supreme Self, it is the self-body analogy that most directly and most richly explicates the meaning of this dependent relationship. Not only does this analogy take us to the core of Viśiṣṭadvaita's whole conceptual structure but Ramanuja self-resorts to it specifically at so many crucial points in his explication of this system. And such is the intrinsic meaning of analogy that even when Ramanuja is referring to Brahman as the Supreme Self of all, there is always the implication that the all else is His body.

Keyword: Integrating concept - of Sri Ramanuja's system of Viśiṣṭadvaita - the sartra-sariri-bhava. - similarly - prakara-prakaribhava - whole conceptual structure - Vedārtha-Samgraha,- interpretation of Arjuna's response - expounds the Purāṇic evidence - Hermeneutical significance - Epistemological significance - Ontological significance - Cosmological significance - Theological significance - Soteriological significance - soul's ethical progress - analogy of the self-body relationship

Introduction

Every religious system is integrated around some central principle complex though the process of integration may be. At the core of each tradition there is no doubt, an intuited vision. But the vision will invariably be articulated in some conceptual or analogical form, even when the vision itself is said to be ineffable. Thus it is possible to discover an integrating concept at the centre of each religious system. Without probing to this cohering core and analyzing its conceptual structure and significance, there can be no conceptual understanding of any religious tradition.

The central explicating analogy of Sri Ramanuja's system of Viśiṣṭadvaita is the sartra-sariri-bhava. I realize that others have argued similarly for the priority of the prakara-prakaribhava this was certainly a prominent relational category in Ramanuja's system, just as were the sesa-sest and amsa-amśi relationships. While, however, the prakara analogy signifies in a general way the utter dependence of the universe on the Supreme Self, it is the self-body analogy that most directly and most richly explicates the meaning of this dependent relationship. Not only does this analogy take us to the core of Viśiṣṭadvaita's whole conceptual structure but Ramanuja self-resorts to it specifically at so many crucial points in his explication of this system. And such is the intrinsic meaning of analogy that even when Ramanuja is referring to Brahman as the Supreme Self of all, there is always the implication that the all else is His body. Thus when Ramanuja begins his great systematic treatise, Vedārtha-Samgraha, in the first few verses there may not be a direct use of the sarira-śariri-bhava. But as soon as it necessary to expound the Sad-vidya's climactic words, Tat-tvam-asi, Ramanuja makes explicit what was previously implicit-that the relationship of the Lord to the world is to be grasped only by considering the self-body relationship. Thus statement Tat-tvam-asi" sums up the jiva's attributive relationship to Brahman.

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For as He is the Self of the entire universe, and as this entire universe constitutes His body, thus being a typification of Brahman, Brahman is the Self of each jiva and the jiva can be denoted by tvam. Because, therefore, all sentient and non-sentient beings constitute His body, Brahman embodied in and typified by all-is denoted by all words ^[1]. Or we may take by way of illustration another extremely important passage-Ramanuja's interpretation of Arjuna's response to the glorious visva-rapa-daršana, which is undoubtedly the climactic point of the Bhagavad-Gitā. Thus On 11-40:

aparimita-virya, aparimita-parakramas-tvaisarvam-
štmatayasamapnoṣi, tatas-sarvosi-yatas-tvarm
sarvathacid-acid-vastujātam-ātmatayāsamapnoṣi,
atahsarvasyacid-acid-vastu-jātasyatvac-chariratayā
tvat-prakāratvat-sarva-prakāras-tvam-evasarva-
sabda-vacyo 'si-iti-arthah.' ^[2]

In addition to the self-body, which seems to me to be used in an illustrative as well as a determinative manner, there are other ideas in these passages which we will need to bring out later. In both these very important passages, however, it seems clear enough that the self-body analogy determines the meaning of the more general prakara-concept, mainly because Selfhood is as fundamental as a determining category in the whole Vedantic tradition. It is this analogical relationship, therefore, that is Ramanuja's integrating and explicating core-concept.

If any further proof is required to substantiate this thesis, I would point to that richly suggestive section in the first Sutra of Sribhāṣya, in which Rāmānuja expounds the Purāṇic evidence for the reality of the universe. The Sarira-sariri-bhāva is prominent throughout. The climactic sentence is: Those enlightened ones, on the other hand, with their insight into the essential nature of the Self, having their minds cleared by devotion, which is the means of experiencing the Lord as the universal Self, such ones see this entire world with its various kinds of bodies...as Thy [the Lord's] body ' ^[3]. It is not possible in this paper to trace the derivation of this sarira-sariri-bhava.⁴ certainly; there are clear antecedents in śruti and smṛti, as well as in the Sri-Vaiṣṇava tradition prior to Rāmānuja. But the great Acarya's originality in making this concept so centrally integrative to Viśiṣṭadvaita should not be under-rated. This was the work of a creative theological genius. That visionary who can provide his followers with an explicating core-concept, the significance of which persistently points them to the primal vision of Reality, and leads them to a more and more clear understanding of that Reality, and is so creative as to afford insights that even the visionary himself did not explicitly articulate-that visionary is a theological as well as a religious genius. Sarira-Sariri-bhāva has precisely this kind of richly creative quality. Its seminal potency ensures that the full maturing and flowering of the original vision is yet to be seen.

I will classify my analysis of our core-analogy under seven heads, covering the whole range of concerns raised in religious philosophy.

1. Hermeneutical significance

Ramanuja began his systematizing work with the assumption that all scripture-the whole sacred tradition, Vedic and Vaiṣṇava-should be taken as authoritative for our understanding of Reality, though he only overtly refers to generally accepted Vedantic sources in his He was fully aware that inconsistencies seem ancient writings. to be there in the

various śākhās. But he was not prepared to fall back on Sankara's principle of selective hermeneutics, in which only eka-vākyas are allowed to determine the meaning of the whole, and no vākyas can be taken in any sense other than a lakṣanārtha; for (said Sankara) words can never be more than indirect pointers to the veiled mystery that is Reality.

Now it is true that Rāmānuja does take the concept of relational existence, especially the self-body analogical relationship, as his hermeneutical determinant. But this has such an intrinsic inclusiveness that it becomes possible to accept all scriptural revelation as equally valid contributions to our knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. In the course of his refutation of the Advaita theory of avidyā and mayā (in the Jijnāsa-adhikāraṇa), Rāmānuja had found it necessary to argue for a different interpretation of śruti from that followed by Advaita; he corroborates this interpretation with an impressive array of texts from smṛti. This then prompts the need for articulating some positive and comprehensive basis for his hermeneutical and exegetical method. Much of the last part of Jijnāsa-adhikāraṇa, therefore, is Rāmānuja's attempt to outline the principles of his hermeneutical method. It gives the basis for the type of samanvaya he sees between the varied kinds of texts found in scripture ^[5]. And throughout this passage, there is constant reference to the need to see every text in the light of the sarira-sariri-bhāva. For example this relation of soul and body forms the basis of the statements of co-ordination made in the next śloka'. Then, again, on that key eka-vākyas, Tat-tvam-asi', the co-ordination of the constituent parts is not meant to convey the idea of the absolute unity of a non-differenced substance: on the contrary, the words "that" and thou "denote a Brahman distinguished by difference. For the word "that" refers to Brahman as the omniscient, etc... and the word thou" conveys the idea of Brahman in so far as having for Its body the universe of cit and acit understood to refer to Brahman as having individual souls for His body, both words keep their primary denotation (i.e., not merely lakṣapartha) and the text thus making a declaration about one substance distinguished by two aspects (prakāra-dvaya), the fundamental co-ordinating principle is preserved...It moreover satisfies the demand of agreement with the teaching of the earlier part of the section (upakrama-anukilata), and it also fulfils the promise that all things are to be known through one thing, that is, in so far as Brahman has for His body all cid-acit beings...And this interpretation finally avoids all conflict with other scriptural passages'

As against Bhedabheda, Rāmānuja goes on to state that those who take their stand on the doctrine, proclaimed by all Upanisads, that the entire world forms the body of Brahman, may accept in their fullness all the texts teaching the identity of world with Brahman. For as genus (jai) and quality (guna), so substances (dravya) also may occupy the position determining attributes (viśeṣaṇa), in so far as they constitute the body of something else'.

Then, in a summary section bringing together a variety of exits with superficially disparate meanings, Rāmānuja concludes that 'on this method of (self-body analogical) Interpretation we find that the texts declaring essential distinction and separation of non-sentient matter, sentient beings and the Lord and those declaring Him to be the cause and the world to be the effect, and cause and effect to be identical, do not in any way conflict with other texts declaring him matter and souls form the body of the Lord...'. It is this latter analogical perspective that is able to integrate the full range of Vedantic texts into a coherent whole in which each

kind of statement about Brahman and universe is taken with equal seriousness resulting in a conclusion that is sarva-samanjasam', to use the closing words of Sribhāṣya, Thus, the vision of Reality that Ramanuja seeks to articulate is certainly inclusive, an organic synthesis'. At the same time, it is also integrated around a concept that is decisive in its conceptual and hermeneutical significance, It carries its own inner coherence at needs to be clearly distinguished from all other systems. Thus Rāmānuja himself is frequently able to use this sarira-sariri-bhava to delineate his own position when in debate with other systems. Our contemporary concern, admirable though it may be, to avoid a negative polemical stance, should not be allowed to obscure the distinctiveness that is inherent in Visista- advaita's inclusive interpretation of Reality.

2. Epistemological significance

One essential reason why viśiṣṭādvaita's method of interpretation hinges on the śariraSarir-bhava, and why the delineation of its position in relation of this same analogy, is because in Vis Vistadvaita knowledge itself is of this relational Thus, very early in his exposition of what Brahma- to other systems is often by means kind. Jijnāsā means Rāmānuja points out that of the Pramdg s, those accepted authentic means by which we are able to know anything with certainty each has an intrinsically relational structure. They therefore indicate the essentially relational character of that which is to be known, to use current communications jargon, the medium is the message" That is, you cannot communicate anything that is not inherent in your means of communication. Ramanuja, however, goes further than this, He asserts that consciousness is always the self's consciousness of something. Such attributive or relational consciousness is essential to the self's being, Consciousness is that attribute of the self by which it relates to the other. And here it becomes immediately obvious that Rāmānuja allows a very positive role to the body in the whole process by which a self comes to know things, and indeed in the process by which selves are known. It is, however, a mistake to imagine that Rāmānuja limits knowledge, especially the knowledge of Brahman, to mere cognition, important though this may be to his understanding of the self-Brahman relationship. This relationship goes beyond, even though it includes, cognition, for it is essentially of the nature of upāsana-bhakti. It imparts a new dimension to the Brahman- knowing process. For it is devout meditation that lovingly recalls the nature of the loved one that was previously cognised, until there is an intimacy of relationship like the smooth, unbroken flow of oil.

Ramanuja himself clearly sees that even in the cognition-based relationship of love, there is such an immediacy of perception that (as he declares almost at the outset of his Laghu-Siddhānta) it 'has the character of "seeing" or "vision", and this "vision" consists in possessing the character of immediate presentation (pratyakṣata)...(or) by direct intuition (sāksatkara) which is dear above all things, since the Object remembered is so dear'ó.

Now it is precisely this kind of mediated-immediacy that we find in the relationship of a self to its body, or vice-versa. There is such a directness of experience bodily existence that some modern interpreters of the self-body relationship even argue of body alone-all self-experience being said to be merely body experience. Commonsense (apart from our traditional doctrines of the self, and the sophisticated arguments to support them) says that this takes the self-body inseparability' to a ridiculous extreme. But their intimacy of

mutual knowledge is such that the self-body analogy in for the existence that can be brought in provides us with helpful insights into the nature of knowledge of the Supreme Self, to whom, says Ramanuja, we relate as body to self.

3. Ontological significance

Rāmānuja does argue that ways of knowing, and indeed the very nature of consciousness, implies a particular kind of ontological perspective. But this does not mean that epistemology determines ontology, as some have asserted. First comes the vision of ontic Reality, and according to Vedānta, this vision is granted only through the revelation of sacred scripture. Then comes our conceptual apprehension of this vision. On this basis we then describe and discuss the nature of epistemological and ontological structures. That core-vision of the Sat, the great ontic Reality, is the prion factor it is significant that Rāmānuja begins his great systematic treatise, Vedārtha-Sangraha, with an exposition of Chāndogya's Sad-vidya. Very early in this exposition, Rāmānuja claims that the assertion that we can know all by knowing the One is tenable only if that all" has reality of its own by having the One as its Self. In his Jijnāsa-adhikarana he even more forcefully brings out this conviction that the whole universe ontologically real, precisely because it participates as all-including Reality, the Self of the universe. As the accounts for all beings, or satyasya-Satya, Brahman en exists with His own reality of being. Here, Rāmānuja denies that such common reality of being derives from the mere fact of common substance, as perhaps Samkhya would argue. Statements of identity, he writes, are 'not on nity of substance of the pervading world, but on the fact that (Brahman) pervades the Self, being its inner Ruler', ⁷ tadatmya-antaryamin. Thus it is because the Supreme Self manifests Himself in all beings, includes all beings in His Being, that His reality of Being is communicated to the 'all'-as a self communicates its being to its body.

How then, asks Visistadvaita, can this universe be regarded as mithyā, as lacking that reality belonging to its Self? How then, can scripture's maya-the mysterious power by which He creates and manifests Himself in the world-how can this intend some illusory mode of being? Of course, once sheer San-matra is accepted as the sole Ultimate Reality, some such explanation for our everyday experience of the distinctions of the universe becomes inevitable. Rejecting such an understanding of Brahman as pure-Being, Rāmānuja asserted that just as the body distinguishes its self, relating to it as a distinct characteristic relates to its ground-substance, so distinction characterizes even the transcendent Self, the ground-Sat of all. Reality is essentially visistasya-advaita, a continuity of being characterized by inner distinctions.

It was this basic concept of Brahman's communicating His Reality to all beings, by reason of their comprising His body, that led Rāmānuja also to assert that every entity in the universe, and every word signifying an entity, terminate in and find their ultimate meaning in Brahman, their inner Self. Every word, therefore, can be said to signify the Highest Reality in a direct (i.e. not by lakyana-artha only) sense. For does not the name of each body refer to its soul at the same time? All finite beings, therefore, are able to communicate the reality of that Being which is their inner Self-a concept that has a direct ethical implication, as well as giving a new direction to mystical life. Indeed, such a vision of directly mediated immediacy of the Supreme Reality still awaits more thorough articulation.

4. Cosmological significance

If Ramanuja found the idea of Brahman's 'unreal' manifestation in the universe difficult to accept, he was even more alarmed by Bheda-bheda's account of Brahma-parinama. To say that Brahman at the time of creation engages in a process of self-transformation under the limiting instruments of finitude, is to teach Brahman's essential mutability; it is to say that this Perfect Being really suffers all the imperfections of the cosmic process, or at least the miseries of embodied souls. It is like speaking of a Lord divided in Him, or like Devadatta having 'one hand anointed with sandal-paste and adorned with bracelets and rings, and his other hand hit by a hammer and burning with hell-fire'.

Here again Rāmānuja resorts to his self-body analogy to explain in what sense Brahman as Transcendent Cause is related to His immanently effected state, relationship between Lord and soul is described in terms of identity of essence, then it is unsound to maintain difference: whereas there is no defect at all when this identity is stated in terms of a body-self relation' he universe. When the Just as authentic core-selfhood transcends the changes and sufferings of the body, so the transcendent perfection of the Supreme Self remains unimpaired by the creative process. To argue (as some have done) that such a doctrine must imply that the Supreme Self experiences all the pains to which the body is subject is to miss the point. Apart from Vedānta's conviction that the inner self is eternally immutable, even in the commonsense notion of the self there is a core of selfhood that is thought to continue throughout the body's experiences, even though it is recognised that they become experiences to the body only by means of the self. In other words, the self remains the subject throughout such experiences.

At the same time, however, Ramanuja clearly cannot of the Lord's transcendent perfection in terms of unrelated and remote immutability. Inherent in the self-body analogy is the concept of aprthak-siddhi-sambandhana. Brahman's relationship with the universe, His body, is one of inseparability, even though it in no way impairs His perfection of being. Rāmānuja does seem to distinguish the svaripa of this Perfect Being from His svabhava,¹⁰ Brahman's svarupa is His essential being in itself, those glorious qualities that exist apart altogether from His relationship to the universe. His svabhāva is His related nature, those glorious qualities which express His creating, sustaining, saving relationship with the universe. In Ramanuja's writings generally, however, there is little place for unrelated being, no matter how true he may be to the Vedāntic concern for Transcendent Being that is independent of cosmic contingency. Inseparability of relational being--as substance to attribute, as prototype to all its typifications, and especially as self inseparably related to its body- this is the keynote in Ramanuja's account of Brahman, even in his account of Brahman's transcendent perfection. It is perhaps important to note that Ramanuja does not think of Brahman's embodied state as coming into being only when there is cosmic 32 creation. In a sense, of course, we can say that the body emerges, is manifest, and functions as a unified entity, just because it exists 'in the self, with the self as its animator and co-ordinator. But as far as Brahman's Selfhood is concerned the universal body' is contained within His being even in the unmanifest state of cosmic pralaya. At the time of creation, the Lord wills that His unmanifest body be changed from its causal state into its manifest effect-state. In other words, even in this cosmological process, the self-body analogy still plays its conceptual role, and there is 'inseparability' asserted even

of that unmanifest stage when others would want to speak of undifferentiated san-mātra, tan-matra or cin-mātra.

5. Theological significance

Clearly, the previous points have already introduced some of Ramanuja's more specifically theological' concerns, for such overlapping cannot and should not be avoided. To put these concerns in a different form, Rāmānuja was convinced that the saguna Lord of the bhakta was in no way a lower order Being than the nirguna of the jñānin. It must have seemed to him that this absolutist attitude undermined the very basis of the religious life, making both bhakti and even the great Lord whose grace saves his bhaktas less than fully real. This makes the devotional relationship merely part of the maya-order, conditioned by upādhi-existence, characterized by avidyā, all to be superseded by the transcendent realisation of nirgunatva. 'No', replied Rāmānuja, 'it is precisely the glorious qualities of the Supreme Person that comprise and make clear His transcendence, His greatness over all-else'. The word "Brahman" denotes the Highest Person, who is essentially free from all imperfections and possesses innumerable kinds of glorious qualities of incomparable excellence',! to quote his initial definition of this all-important term.

I have delayed any reference to Ramanuja's definitions of the body until now, as they seem primarily to support the idea of Brahman's lordly control of the universe, as a self controls the body with which it is associated. To take a Vedārtha-Samgraha definition first 'The relation between self and body means the inseparable relationship between a dependent entity and that on which it is grounded, between a controlling entity and that which it controls, between a principal and its subordinate

(prthak-siddhi-anarha-adhara-adheya-bhaveniyantpniamya-bhavaḥśeṣa-śeṣi-bhavaś-ca).¹² He goes on to define the Atman as peculiarly appropriate to such a relationship, for it is 'the one who obtains an object, being in all respects the adhāra, the niyantr, and the seṣin. Then there is the well-known definition of the body in Sribhāṣya 2.1.9:

yasyacetanasyayaddravyamsarva-
ātmanasvartheniyantumdhārayitum ca sakyam tac-
cheṣata-eka- svarupam ca tat tasyaśariram.

The significant new point being made here is that the body's control is by a conscious agent that is able to control and support the body for its own ends, thus confirming the belief that the self is essentially sva-tanira, the bodypara-tantra. In Ramanuja's case, however, when the analogy is applied to the Lord-world relationship, the independent character of individual selves is necessarily limited to such autonomy as is permitted by the Supreme Self. Ramanuja goes on here in Sribhāṣya 2.1.9: 'All sentient and non-sentient beings together comprise the body of the Supreme Person, for they are completely controlled and supported by Him for His own ends, and they are essentially subordinate to Him'(a-sesatā-eka-svariupam) (Cf. also Gīta-bhāṣya 10.20).

As the Inner Self of alil, then, Brahman is the Inner Controller of all, which is precisely the point made in the Antaryami-Brāhmana. There, as with many other scriptural passages too, the sense of inner control is explicit in the text. Such is Ramanuja's concern for the lordliness of Brahman in relation to His universe, that even in passages where there is no explicit references to Iévaratva he makes it an integral part of the text's meaning. For example, while expounding Tat-tnamasi', he writes: If the text is understood to refer to Brahman as

having individual souls for His body. The fundamental principle of co-ordination is preserved. On this interpretation the text further intimates that Brahma, free from all imperfection and endued with all glorious qualities, is the Inner Controller of individual selves and possesses lordly power (aiśwaryam-param)^[13].

A process' analysis of the self-body existence of man has pointed out that bodily control...remains the only clear case of instantaneous, non-mediated words, our volitions have an immediate effect in bodily experience in some form or other. There is an immediacy of communication between self and body. And the more perfect the individual's self-control, the more immediate and perfect the communication. In this sense, therefore, bodily experience is a form of self-becoming, or self-manifestation control we have.¹⁴ In other words, in the case of each individual's self-control and self-becoming through the body, there are obvious limitations. There are the counter-volitions of other individuals, and the limitations imposed by the natural universe within which the body functions. Transpose this self-body relationship to the inverse relationship, however, and these limitations disappear. This Supreme Self is in no way subject to the limiting counteraction of bodies outside His own body. Thus He alone possesses a body unconditionally. He alone communicates His will to His body with perfect immediacy. He alone is the Perfect Self, supremely Subject in relation to the universe, His body. He alone is satya-kāma, satya samkalpa¹⁵, a Supreme Person whose volitions are immediately effective and whose desires perfectly realised. This is complete self-manifestation through bodily existence. His body alone is not determined by karmic law; karma itself is under His control. The doctrine of the Lord's lila-vibhiti could also be taken as another aspect of His perfect and immediate control of the universe. The point being made in this analogy is not so much that the Lord regards His creative activity as playful sport and therefore mere amusement and of little account. Its primary intention is to show how activity is possible without there being some unfulfilled need that the agent of the action is determined by. The Lord does not will something in order to obtain some benefit for Himself. His willing, controlling, and acting are but aspects of His perfect and immediate self-communication; His creative action is not compelled by any force outside His own blissful will.

6. Soteriological significance

All religions, certainly Indian religious systems, have a fundamental concern to attain some goal thought to be ultimately desirable. In Indian religions, Mukti from the bondage of karma-samsara is the most common soteriological aim. For Rāmānuja, if we take his major writings as sources, it is upasana-bhakti that is thought to be the great sādhanā for realizing this sadhya. Of course, the Vedantic understanding of Brahman was such that He could not be reduced to the role of a mere means to some other end. He is found to be Ultimate End as well as the necessary means to that End. And the bhakta will become so conscious of the grace and love of his Lord as the only sure basis of both the sādhanā practiced or the sadhya desired, that he will realise in the last resort he is utterly dependent upon saranāgati. He who recognizes that dependent relationship with the Lord is the ultimately desirable End as well as the only effective means, and that such a relationship is determined by divine grace, cannot but throw himself upon the mercy of that gracious Lord. Thus bhakti seems inevitably to lead to saranagati: and śaranagati will certainly in its turn stimulate the bhakti-bhava. But I will

take this thought no further as I realize the bhakti-prapatti issue is a very sensitive one in the Sri-Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Whether we see bhakti, prapatti, or bhakti-prapatti, as the most effective sādhanā, think how understanding of this liberating process is enriched when set within the Self-tody relationship.

When the gracious Lord is seen as the inner self inseparably related to His bhaktas, including them within His very Being as well as within the circle of His audarya, vātsalya, and so on.

Such ontological intimacy makes the soteriological process significant in quite a new way. In some other religious systems, there is even an inherent incommensurability between them. Within the sarira-sariri-framework, though, the sādhanas as well as the Goal, are integrated into the system as a whole. The mukri-process then becomes a realisation of intrinsic inseparability, and the mumukṣu's gradual growth in the very qualities characterising the inner Self (at least those qualities that the finite soul can properly share with the infinitely Supreme Person) becomes a movement towards the soul's Centre of Being.

If the Lord's avatara, even arcavātara, is held to be the most significant instance of the divine grace by means of which the bhakta attains mukri, then again how entirely appropriate is the self-body analogical background against which to understand such special embodiments by the Lord. A convincing doctrine of divine embodiment requires a doctrine of creation in which materiality as such is seen as a suitable medium for divine self-manifestation. This will inevitably mean that a divine embodiment needs to be more than merely a manifestation, without any continuing. Reality of its material form. Of the three major Vedāntins, it is surely Rāmānuja who in relation to such a divine embodiment, provides us with the most convincing creation-model...the particular Avātara-embodiment gives intense focus to the general Parināma-embodiment of creation; the stage is set for a real incarnation of God in material human nature^[16].

7. Ethical significance

One of the important issues discussed in Vedānta is whether or not the jiva is a responsible agent of action.¹⁷ Rāmānuja, unlike Sāṅkara, has no doubt that the self is capable of action, even though it does not possess absolute autonomy: Its kartriva is quite real, though dependent upon the permitting will of the Lord, as Rāmānuja goes on to say in Sribhāṣya. 2. 3. 41. What precisely is this subtle relationship then, between the Lord permitting His dependants to act, and these dependants who yet have sufficient freedom to be responsible agents? Following the lead of the Sūtra-kāra, Rāmānuja first says that it is an amsa-amsin relationship, usually translated as a part-whole relationship. It should be noted that Rāmānuja is well aware that the soul cannot be a quantifiable piece or khanda of Brahman the Supreme Self is certainly without such divisible parts. (It is apurvapakṣa point in 2.3. 42). Nor should the whole-part relationship be taken to imply that the finite agent is of the same nature or svarūpa as the Lord who permits such fiat action. Though a subtle inseparability between them is clearly required. Rāmānuja therefore concludes: The jiva is an amsa of paramātmā; as a light issuing from a luminous thing...or as the body is part of an embodied thing' (2. 3. 45) Then, after again declaring both the distinction in essential nature, and hence in freedom of action, as well as the soul inability to function separately, Rāmānuja sums up the whole argument by saying that the jiva is part of Brahman in so far as it is His body (2. 3. 46). The analogy

allows room for sufficient freedom of moral activity, while stressing at the same time that the soul is dependent for this power of action upon the controlling will of the Supreme Self. Another related issue in Vedanta is the way in which the jnana-kānda relates to karma-kānda, or how the duties enjoined in scripture relate to transcendent Brahman-knowledge. With-out going into the details of the discussion here, note that Ramanuja refuses to allow any radical discontinuity between them. The final part of Vedartha-Saṅgraha¹⁸ seems a pertinent source for understanding Rāmanuja on this issue significantly it follows a refutation of Prabhākara's position on the interpretation of scripture. That in turn had been preceded by a passage declaring that all beings, including the various deities, to whom sacrifices are done, comprise the Supreme Person's body. Ramanuja then goes on to argue that inasmuch as all deities constitute the body of the Lord, acts performed with the aim of evoking a particular benefit from a particular deity in reality are done to the Lord Himself. And all actions done with genuine devotion, Ramanuja asserts, are pleasing to that Supreme Self. More important, is not that Supreme Self so glorious in all His perfections and His supreme beauty that all possible actions His body can perform to please Him are entirely worthy of Him? Thus, while Ramanuja does not formally teach karma-jñāna-samuccaya, it is this kind of synthesis that his inclusive bhakti-bhava, undergirded as it is by his sarira-śarīri-bhava, implies. The devotee, aware that he is part of the body of the Lord, and enthused by his knowledge of that Supreme Self's glorious perfections, will desire to serve the Lord in every way he is able we may merely We have already noted that Rāmanuja's vision of Readline gives ultimate value to the cosmic process, and therefore to the jiva's activity within it. For this universe is the Supreme Person's body, and is therefore supremely real. But Ram takes us a step beyond this. The body, he asserts, exists for the sake of its self: its actions are directed towards the well being of that self. Similarly, the universe exists for the sake of the Supreme Self: it exists to serve and to glorify Him. As His body, it is His self existing essentially in subservience so another. Such subservience is, however, no soul, for the Supreme Person is found to be a treasury of hosts of innumerable and immeasurable beautiful able, possessing an infinite supernal manifestation, an ocean of immeasurable and absolute goodness, beauty and love^[19] Far from diminishing human or cosmic value, therefore, this conviction that our service and our very existence is useful the Supreme, immeasurably enhances such value. In a strictly ontological sense, of course, Ramanuja recognizes that finite beings cannot contribute anything of value to, or anything that is needed by, that Supremely Perfect Being. At this point Rāmanuja acknowledges that the self-body analogy proves inadequate. It is His graciousness that makes the devotee's kankarya and sevā acceptable to the Lord. He is even ready to make Himself dependent upon their loving service because of His love for them^[20].

Conclusion

What, then, is the final step in the soul's ethical progress? Surely it is to recognise that the whole universe, and especially human beings with their unique union of cid-acit being, are the Lord's beloved body. Just as the devotee seeks to serve the Lord Himself, so he should seek to serve his Lord's self-manifestation in the form of His universal body. Perhaps it is this implicit aspect of the great Acārya's core-vision (his all determining analogy of the self-body

relationship) that today needs to be explored more fully by his followers.

References

1. Sri Bhagavad RāmanujaGranthamala (hereafter RGM). edit. Sri Kanchi P. B. AnnangaracharyaSwamy, Kancheepuram, 1956, pp. 4-5. Cf. J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Rāmanuja'sVedarthaSangraha. Poona. 1956, p. 194.
2. RGM p. 105; cf. M. R. Sampatkumaran's translation of 11.40 in The Gita-Bhāshya of Ramanuja. Madras, 1969.
3. RGM p. 81 (also pp. 77-84); Thibaut's translation. p. 95.
4. I have already attempted this in God and the Universe in the Vedantic Theology of Rāmanujya, Madras, 1976, pp. 29-48.
5. RGM pp. 93-101; Thibaut, pp. 126-44.
6. RGM pp. 52-3; Thibaut, pp. 15-16.
7. RGM p. 80; Thibaut p. 92
8. Cf. Van Buitenen, p. 226; RGM p. 14.
9. Is varasyasvarupenatādātmya-varzanesyad-ayam doṣahlatma-sarira-bhāvenatutadatmya-pratipādane nakim-cid-dosah.
10. J. B. Carman, in his Theology of Rāmanujia (New Haven, 1974) has brought out this point well.
11. Sribhāṣya, 1.1.1 Thibaut, p. 4
12. Cf. Van Buitenen, p. 235; RGM p. 18.
13. RGM p. 96; Thibaut, p. 132
14. C. Hartshorne. Man's Vision of God. I am indebted league, Christopher Duraisingh to my coll, for the ideas in this and the following paragraphs. Cf. his unpublished doctoral thesis; Towards an Indian-Christian Theology: Ramanuja's Significance. Harvard University, 1979.
15. Sribhāṣya, 3.3.39
16. The Relevance of Research in Religions: Understanding Avatara as a Test-Case' Bangalore Theologieel Forum, Vol. X, No. 1, 1978, p. 52.
17. Cf. Sribhāṣya, 2.3.33-9.
18. Cf. Van Buitenen, paras. 110-24.
19. Ibid. para. 142
20. Gita-Bhāṣya, 7.12, 8. 18.