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## THE CONCEPT OF BHAKTI IN SRI RAMANUJA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is to bring to light the salient features of the traditional and the modern concept of Bhakti in the light of Sri Ramanuja and Swami Vivekananda. It brings out the differences and distinctions between them and shows how they substantiate their positions in respect of Liberation.

**KEY WORDS:** Para Bhakti, Parama Bhakti, Prema Bhakti, eka Bhakti, Para jnana, Liberation, knowledge, love, yoga,

### INTRODUCTION

#### Meaning of Bhakti

The term bhakti is derived from the root word bhaj which means seva or meditation ( bhaj sevayam).1 Bhakti as a means or upaya to moksa is defined as unceasing meditation done with love on the Supreme Being ( snehapurvam – anudhyanam).

#### SRI RAMANUJA'S CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

Sri Ramanuja's views of bhakti is meditation on Brahman touched with love or priti.it is absolute devotion to Bhagavan as the life of our life and is love for love's sake.2

The true Bhakta is the true jnani, because he knows that Bhagavan alone is the source and satisfaction of life. For this, Sri Ramanuja says that the Bhakta recognizes Bhagavan as his only Lord and serves His will, as such service is the only goal of religious experience and constitutes the highest joy of life or rasa.3

The Jnani meditates on Brahman as his self and cultivates exclusive devotion to Him or eka bhakti. When it develops into a thirst for the direct intuition of Bhagavan it is called para jnana. Then the view of God becomes a vision of God, but it is still not perfect; love leads to a continuous and deep longing for God and unquenchable spiritual thirst and then para bhakti becomes parama bhakti.

The Gita has also made a distinction between para bhakti and parama bhakti and parama bhakti has been described as the highest form of devotion. para bhakti deepens into parama bhakti only when the devotee

does not care for anything else except the love of his beloved master, places his heart in the heart of God and clings to Him as his only refuge.<sup>4</sup>

The bhakta at this stage is not satisfied by mere visions, voices and auditions which are only intimations of immortality, but eagerly and restlessly seeks the stability of eternal bliss. The bhakti longs to see the beautiful form of Bhagavan with the eye of the soul and hear the music of love with the spiritual ear.

The supreme value of bhakti is considered to be the accessibility of the Lord to His Bhakta and adaptability to his devotional needs. Bhakti is for the sake of bhakti and has its fruition in absolute self - surrender to Bhagavan as the Upaya or means and the Upeya or end. When Bhakta seeks God, Sri Ramanuja believes that God also seeks him and the lover and the beloved are finally united in the realm of mukti.

According to Ramanuja, salvation means dissociation of the self from all influences of prakrti and also of selfish actions, because the latter remain operative in the empirical life and prevent the self from having a true knowledge of its free nature.<sup>5</sup> In short, for Sri Ramanuja, liberation means permanent removal of all these obstacles which cause contraction in the dharma - bhuta - jnana.<sup>6</sup>

This is the reason why Ramanuja has attached importance to the performance of the vedic rites also, because vedic actions too help a man to realise the distinction between the immortal soul and the perishable body. So, Ramanuja holds that devotion in cooperation with knowledge and action constitutes the means to reach the summum bonum of life.<sup>7</sup>

## SEVEN – FOLD LIMBS OF BHAKTI

The seven - fold sadhanas leading to bhakti are enumerated by Ramanuja as follows:

1. Viveka – viveka means purification of body by taking only such food which has not been spoiled by Jati and Asraya. In other words, in order to keep one's body pure and spotless, one should take only sattvika food.
2. Vimoka – means freedom from passion and anger as these two are two great obstacles in the path of bhakti.
3. Abhyasa – continuous remembrance of the presence of God as the indwelling principle with a pure body and a purified mind.
4. Kriya – The mumukshu has got to perform five – fold duties according to his ability.
5. Kalyana – refers to virtue or innerside of duty. It consists of satya or truth, arjaba or purity of thought, word and action, daya or kindness, dana or benevolence and ahimsa or non – violence.
6. Anavasada – means freedom from all sorts of despair, dejection etc.
7. Anudharsa – is the absence of too much excitation on account of pleasure and too much depression on account of pain.

The seven – fold sadhanas of bhakti lead to that state of anubhava (experience) which is just prior to the final realisation of Brahman and which possesses, fullness, vividness and liveliness of perception.<sup>8</sup>

Before reaching the stage of liberation, the Bhakta should develop an inner spiritual attitude in combination of eight virtues which will help Bhakta to deepen his love as prema bhakti. According to Sri Ramanuja, they are (1) sauca or purity (2) ksanti or patience (3) anasuya or absence of jealousy (4) anayasa or absence of depression (5) asprha or absence of covetousness (6) akarpanya or strength of mind (7) mangala or good deed, kind words and noble thought (8) sarva bhuesu daya or love to all beings. <sup>9</sup> The last expression namely love to all beings is the hallmark of visistadvaita which is known as love towards humanity.

Sri Ramanuja says that the love towards God becomes to Bhakta a thirst for communion and this becomes irresistible. The progression in bhakti leads to the awakening of divine grace, by which liberation can be attained.

### SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

Swamiji believes that Bhakti is one of the noblest type in which all the three namely, Knowledge, Love and Yoga are harmoniously fused. 10 Three things are necessary for a bird to fly – the two wings and the tail as the rudder for steering. Jnana (knowledge) is one wing, Bhakti (love) is the other and yoga is the tail that keeps up the balance.

Swamiji says, if you are a real lover of Shiva, you must see Him in everything and in everyone. 11 He further says, "Ignorance is the cause of all this bondage. It is through ignorance that we have become bound; knowledge will cure it, by taking us to the other side." How will that knowledge come? Through love, bhakti, by the worship of God, by loving all beings as the temples of God.

Swamiji once again reiterates his position by saying "The highest form of worship that had been laid down by the Bhakta was the worship of man." The Bhakta should be ready to stand-up and say, "I do not want anything from you Lord, but if you need anything from me I am ready to give."12

How can man prove the existence of God? Love was the most visible of all visible things. It was that infinite love the only motive power of this universe, visible everywhere, and this was God Himself. The man who begins to worship God will grow by degrees, and begin to Love God for Love's sake.

### Bhakta – Bhakti relationship

According to Swami Vivekananda, Isvara is without form yet has all forms, is without qualities yet has all qualities – as human beings, we have to see the trinity of existence of God, man and nature and we cannot do otherwise.13

Swamiji feels that for any Bhakta all philosophical distinctions would result only in idle talk. One who could lose oneself in pure love of God, Swamiji says could not aspire for liberation. He says, I do not want to be sugar, I want to taste sugar. I want to love and enjoy the beloved.14

### PURE LOVE AS THE MEANS TO PURE BHAKTI

Swamiji claims that there are even Bhakta's who worship God as their own child, so that there may remain no feeling even of awe or reverence. There can be no fear in true love. In bhakti, there is also no place for begging or bargaining with God. Bhakta will not pray for health or wealth or even to go to heaven.

One who wants to love God and become Bhakta, he must give up all the desires. He who wants to enter the realms of light must throw away all "shop keeping" religion. Swamiji says "Fools indeed is he, who living on the banks of the Ganga digs a little well for water."15 The love of the Bhakta must be absolutely pure and unselfish seeking nothing for itself either here or hereafter.

We can find in almost every religion, there are three primary things which we have in the worship of God – forms or symbols, names, god – men. He says, these are the external forms of devotion, through which man has to pass, but if he is sincere, if he really wants to reach the truth, he goes higher than these, to a plane, where forms are nothing.16

What is the difference between love and shop-keeping? The first test of love is that it knows no bargaining. The second test is that love knows no fear and the third test is still higher, that is love is always the highest ideal. If one has passed through the first two stages, and if he has thrown off all shop keeping and cast off all fear, then one begins to realize that love is always the highest ideal.

## Liberation

According to Swami Vivekananda, Liberation means entire freedom (i.e.) freedom from the bondage of good as well as from the bondage of evil.<sup>16</sup> It means that bhakti when intensified towards God through love it cares for nothing in the world except true love, (i.e.) the love shown towards fellow human beings without any bias or prejudice. A true bhakta sees in everyone the true love (i.e.) God. In this sense that liberation can be attained by means of bhakti is advocated by Swami Vivekananda.

### SIMILARITIES BETWEEN SRI RAMANUJA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

1. Both of them agree that bhakti starts at the empirical level as prema or love towards fellow beings.
2. Both of them agree that God can be conceived as the nearest relation as father or mother or brother and so on.
3. Both of them agree with external form of worship.
4. Both of them agree that bhakti should be for the sake of bhakti and not for aspiring things or positions in life.
5. Both of them treat bhakti as a synonym for love.
6. Both of them believe that ignorance is the cause for not realising bhakti in its true sense.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SRI RAMANUJA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

1. Sri Ramanuja does not believe in all distinctions. Whereas Swami Vivekananda, believes distinction in forms of worship.
2. Sri Ramanuja believes bhakti to be a blending of jnana and karma. Whereas Swami Vivekananda believes that bhakti must be blended with knowledge, love and yoga.
3. Sri Ramanuja believes in certain virtues to climb the ladder called bhakti. Whereas Swami Vivekananda gives more importance to humanity.
4. Sri Ramanuja transcends empirical love and feels that Bhakta must reach the exalted love namely parama bhakti to reach God. Whereas Swami Vivekananda believes that empirical love is the summum bonum of life.

### CONCLUSION

The preceding discussions between Sri Ramanuja and Swami Vivekananda on the concept of bhakti gives us a clear picture of their respective standpoints. Both of them accept bhakti as the means to liberation from ignorance. Swamiji's view on liberation is that, liberation means a complete freedom from bondage of good and evil. He says that all forms of worship will disappear when one could realize that one is liberated.

Whereas, for Sri Ramanuja, bhakti has been spoken of at two levels (1) ordinary bhakti means prapatti or constant remembrance of God as the only object of devotion and (2) highest bhakti means pure jnana or the immediate intuitive knowledge of God, which is the direct cause of liberation. Even at this stage, the Bhakta requires the grace of God. I understand that Swamiji's concept of bhakti or love is most suited for the modern world to realize one's own life in this earth.

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