

Tattvasaṁdarbha

The *Tattvasaṁdarbha* chiefly deals with the source of knowledge, i.e., Pramāṇa. Jīva's theory of Pramāṇa rejects six or eight or ten Pramāṇas. According to him, all these Pramāṇas, except Śabda (i.e., testimony) are defective. In his opinion testimony (śabda) is free from defects and there are four kinds of error to which man is naturally liable. As a source of knowledge the only authentic and reliable Pramāṇa is Śabda, which is the source of all super-physical knowledge and which consists of revealed words (aprākṛta-vacana-lakṣaṇa). This Śabdapramāṇa again includes Śruti which denotes mainly the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. In the present age of decadence Vedas are not easily understood; hence Itihāsa and Purāṇas were composed to interpret the mystery of the Vedas. Thus the Purāṇas are complement to the Vedas. Those who know the four Vedas with the Upaniṣads and the Vedāṅgas but do not know the Purāṇas, cannot, in the opinion of the author, be regarded as truly learned man. In this Saṁdarbha efforts have been made to make all other Pramāṇas subordinate to testimony or Śabda.

According to the author of the *Tattvasaṁdarbha* the Purāṇa is even superior to the Veda for its intelligibility and accessibility. The text of the *Tattvasaṁdarbha* is mostly selected from the Purāṇas and their authenticity has been established on the strength of the statements made by themselves. Here we find Jīva's skilful compilation of the text. But as the Purāṇas are not available in their completeness and they profess different gods, common people are puzzled to understand their purport. In this sense, the Purāṇas are not suitable for the present age. The Purāṇas, are therefore, divided into Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika group eulogizing Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva respectively. According to Jīva, the author of the *Tattvasaṁdarbha*, only Sāttvika Purāṇas are accepted by

the Vaiṣṇavas, and this means that Jīva, like other sectarian apologists, firmly believes and makes us believe that the Purāṇas, falling under Sāttvika group are alone capable of dealing with truth and interpreting the Śruti truly. According to Jīva and like other Vaiṣṇava followers, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the highest and most authoritative among all the Purāṇas. Even it is superior to *Brahmasūtra* which includes briefness, crypticism and various interpretations. But the fact is not true; for, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is not accepted as authoritative one by the followers belonging to other sects. S.K. De very nicely remarks: 'Although one very conveniently forgets that the *Bhāgavata* also, like the *Brahmasūtra*, is not acknowledged on all hands'.³

According to Jīva, Vyāsa composed *Bhāgavata* which he obtained through spiritual meditation. In this work he found a synthesis of all the Śāstras and it forms the only pure commentary of his own Sūtras (cf. 'nijasūtrāṇām akṛtrima - bhāṣya-bhūtam'). Because of the direct revelation of the Bhagavat (cf. 'sāksād bhagavatodita') the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is regarded as the most authoritative. To show the identity of the *Brahmasūtra* and *Bhāgavata*, which the school firmly believes, Jīva makes several attempts to show directly that some of the *Bhāgavata* verses have the same meaning as some of the Sūtras of Vyāsa. In his *Paramātmasaṁdarbha*, for instance, Jīva gives a detailed exposition of the first verse of the *Bhāgavata* as containing the entire gist of the *Brahmasūtra* and the Gāyatrī, a particular Vedic verse, expressed in the metre of that name which the Hindus deem very religious and pious. Jīva thus justifies his view to rely on the *Bhāgavata* not only as his sole authority for this work, but also for his subject-matter. As he claimed his own words are meant to introduce and explain the words of the *Bhāgavata*, just as the various Sūtras of the *Brahmasūtra* serve the purpose of introducing the different Upaniṣadic verses indicated by them.

Jīva states that his own Saṁdarbhas explain the drift of the *Bhāgavata* for determining the highest truth. The system of Jīva's interpretation is totally based upon a direct

explication of the *Bhāgavata* in the light of the peculiar tenets of his school. Indeed, the unquestionable acceptance of the *Bhāgavata* must be regarded as one of the fundamental postulates of the school.

The fact that Śrīdharasvāmin's interpretation of the *Bhāgavata* which is nothing but a reconciliation of the Advaitavāda of Śaṅkara with the Bhaktivāda of medieval Vaiṣṇava sects, is accepted by the school to which Jīva belongs, except its treatment of doctrine of Māyā. According to Jīva the true object of Śrīdhara was not to effect such a reconciliation but to teach the doctrine of Bhakti. He is, therefore, called a perfect Vaiṣṇava. In the same way, the commentary of Rāmānuja is widely accepted by the school of Jīva, though not in its entirety, as it comes from the south, a stronghold of Vaiṣṇavism, Jīva states that he will follow the *Bhāgavata* commentary of Śrīdhara, but only when it represents the purely Vaiṣṇava point of view. In the cases contrary to this he strongly expresses his view to follow the views of Rāmānuja, although it is not clear enough why Jīva mentions Rāmānuja's name who has apparently not composed any work on the *Bhāgavata*.

Jīva states Sambandha, Abhidheya and Prayojana of his work while dealing with Prameya or object of knowledge. These (i.e. the Sambandha, etc.) are identical with the *Bhāgavata*. About the origin of *Śrīmadbhāgavata* Jīva tells that it comes from the extraordinary illuminating Samādhi of Vyāsa. The term Samādhi is used in Vedānta and Yoga to signify the steady and concentrated dwelling of the mind on a single object, on a particular conception. But in devotional literature the word is used to indicate the absorption of the mind in a spiritual mood, wherein one communicates with the object of one's devotion and in an unspeakable ecstasy undergoes delightful vision. About Vyāsa's Samādhi we should note one point that it is only one of several, different versions in connection with the origin of the *Bhāgavata*. Opinions crowd that Vyāsa received a summarized version of the *Bhāgavata* directly from the divine sage Nārada, who himself heard it either directly from Nārāyaṇa or from his father, Brahmā.

Vyāsa realised the essential difference or duality as well as identity, between the Jīva (individual) and the Parameśvara. Although the Jīva consists of pure consciousness (cidrūpa), yet it remains clouded up by the Māyāśakti, which is the cause of Saṁsāra (bondage), while Māyā, being an extraneous Śakti of the Bhagavat, the Bhagavat is superior to it and is beyond its influence. Empirically, therefore, Jīva Gosvāmin deals with Paricchedavāda which says that the difference between Jīva (individual) and Parameśvara is not real but is due to a difference in attributes (*upādhi*), by means of which non-discrete Brahman becomes discrete. He also discusses *Prativimbavāda*—a theory which believes that the conscious principle which reflects itself in *Vidyā* is Brahman, and which reflects itself in *Avidyā* is *Jīva* (individual) like the Sun reflected respectively in an open lake and in closed pitcher. Thus, according to this theory, Jīva (individual) is the minimal reflex of Parameśvara. Jīva Gosvāmin does not believe in the identity of Jīva (individual) with Brahman barring the former's attributes (*ekajīvavāda*). He advocates, on the authority of the *Bhāgavata*, duality and in his advocacy he lays stress among various emotional approaches to Godhood, propounded in Vaiṣṇava authorities on master-servant relation (*sevyā-sevaka-sambandha*) between God and Jīva. According to Jīva Bhakti or devotion to the Lord is the highest ideal. Mokṣa or emancipation is indeed insignificant, and the Jīva (individual) in its duality continues as a separate worshipping entity even after emancipation. In this way is established the Abhidheya of the *Bhāgavata*, namely, the necessity of worshipping the Bhagavat (*bhagavadbhajana* or *bhakti*).

The only way of dissipating Māyā or attachment is Prīti or love. The Bhaktitattva itself consists of the Upāśya one meditated on the Upāsaka (the meditator) and the Upāsanā (the meditation) in so far as the means of worship relates to Sāadhanabhakti, that is, Bhakti instructed by the Śāstra alone, but Sāadhanabhakti is the first step to Premabhakti which emanates from the grace of the deity. The object of the *Bhāgavata* is to establish clearly that the only Upāśya is Kṛṣṇa, who is not an Avatāra but the Bhagavat or Supreme

Being Himself. That the attainment of divine love is a higher bliss than the bliss of attaining Brahman or Mokṣanirvāṇa is also evident from the fact that Vyāsa composed the *Bhāgavata* with the express purpose of teaching it to Śuka, who had already attained Brahmānanda; and leading him further up to Bhagavatpreman.

Jīva Gosvāmin's philosophy is based on the *Bhāgavata* verse (*Śrīmadbhāgavata* - 1.2.11) which runs thus:

*“vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṃ yajñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavānīti śabdyate”*

The Advayajñānatattva, referred to in the first line of this verse, is explained in the rest of the *Tattvasaṃdarbha*. The appellation of the treatise follows from the elaboration and elucidation of the fundamental principle (absolute reality).

The term Jñāna (in advayajñāna) is explained as consisting of pure consciousness which is self-manifested (*svaprakāśa*). The word Advaya does not mean absolute soul or without a second, but it signifies that 'it is matchless, without an equal'. The ultimate Reality is called Advaya because there is no other self-existent conscious or unconscious principle which is similar to it. In itself also (*svagata-bheda*) the ultimate Reality is Advaya, because it is an indivisible substance in which there is no difference between the essence and the form, such as is found between the conscious principle and the organic body in a human being. It is also called Advaya in the sense that it involves infinite Śaktis or energies but that cannot exist without its ultimate existence. The Advayajñānatattva is finally identified with the Bhagavat as the highest and most perfect manifestation of the Absolute and as such it forms the essential theme of the *Bhāgavata*.

Jīva (individual) is a part of the Paramātman that far transcends the former and forms its ultimate support. As such it has been designated as the Āśraya or the ground by the *Bhāgavata* (ii.1.70). In this connection, it is pointed out

that the Purāṇa deals with ten topics, viz. Sarga, Visarga, Sthāna, Poṣaṇa, Ūti, Manvantara, Īśānukathā, Nirodha, Mukti and Āśraya. Jīva Gosvāmin discusses them but shows that of these the last is the most important. This theory of Āśraya, however, is established by the mystical conception of the three kinds of Puruṣa. None of the Ādhyātmika, Ādhidaivika and Ādhibhautika Puruṣa can be Āśraya as they are interdependent. The Paramātmā alone can be the Āśraya of these as well as of everything else. If the Jīva is sometimes called Āśraya, it is only because the Jīva is a part (amśa) of the Paramātmā.

Thus it appears that the *Tattvasaṁdarbha* serves as an introduction to the work as a whole, and also contains a brief summary of the doctrines found in the other five volumes. About the Āśraya principle it is also seen that since it is described in the *Bhāgavata* as the tenth and final characteristic of Mahāpurāṇa, Jīva next discusses all the ten topics one after the other, in order to show that the first nine ultimately serve the purpose of clarifying the meaning of the tenth, which represents the true import of the *Bhāgavata*. Finally, Jīva returns to the individual point of view to show that the same Āśraya principle which constitutes the ground for the universe is also the ground for the individual souls, dwelling within all beings as the inner controller.

The *Tattvasaṁdarbha* commentaries of Baladeva and Rādhāmohana represent two forces which, though contrary in many respects, exist side by side in the present-day Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. It is to be remembered that the *Tattvasaṁdarbha* of Jīva Gosvāmin is a philosophical work which is read widely still in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school. To this school the *Bhāgavata* is the most authoritative work, most serene Scripture, and the life of Caitanya is the driving force behind the movement. Stuart Elkman in his edition of *Tattvasaṁdarbha* very nicely depicts the present picture of the school: 'At the same time, however, Baladeva's Govindabhāṣya and other writings are accepted as authoritative statements of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava doctrine, despite the important differences which exist between his

philosophical views and Jiva's.'⁴ As a result of the influence of Baladeva's writings and activities, today, many Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas who have not taken sides on the issue of sectarian allegiance, as well as non-Vaiṣṇavas who are not thoroughly conversant with the movement, associates the name of Madhva quite unquestioningly with that of Caitanya and consider the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to be, like the Mādhvas, pure dualists, without having the least knowledge of the complex set of factors that brought forth this tradition.