

Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University)  
Post Graduate Diploma (Theology) Programme 2016-17



The Shuddha Advaita Philosophy of Vallabh Acharya

(In partial fulfilment of requirements for THD 104 PGDT Semester 1)

Submitted By:

Shruti Satsangi

PDGT Candidate

ICT Centre Bangalore

## **Introduction**

The Brahma-Sutra of Badarayana systematizes and summarizes the philosophical and spiritual ideas in the Upanishads and, together with the Principal Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, are the basis of the Vedanta philosophy. These Sutras have been explained by various commentators, from whose interpretations have arisen several schools of Vedanta philosophy, viz., Kevala Advaita philosophy of Sri Sankaracharya, Visisht-advaita of Sri Ramanujacharya, the Dvaita philosophy of Sri Madhavacharya, the Bhedabheda philosophy of Sri Nimbarkacharya, Achintya Bhedabheda philosophy of Sri Chaitanya, the Suddha Advaita philosophy of Sri Vallabhacharya.

Each system of philosophy defines three main concepts viz., God (Brahman), World (Jagat) and Soul (Jivatman) and substantiates these from the Sruti (Vedanta) texts. The several schools of Vedanta philosophy are only different attempts at discovering the Truth. The different Acharyas, belonging to distinctly different branches, became founders of sects and great system-builders.

Vedas primarily contain references to the *advait* (non-dual) nature of Brahman. However, depending on how a scholar perceives those verses, he might see duality -*dvait* - as well. This ambiguity has led to the several Vedanta Darshans or schools of Vedanta philosophy.

*Shuddha advaita* is the Pure Non-Dualism propounded by Sri Vallabhacharya, the founding philosopher and guru of the Pushti Marg, a Hindu Vaishnava tradition focused on the worship of Krishna and stressing the importance of the Grace of the Lord and devotion to Him.

Vallabhacharya's pure form nondualist philosophy is different from Kevala Advaita of Shankaracharya.

## **Life of Vallabhacharya**

Vallabhacharya was one of the last proponents of Vedanta philosophy and lived from 1479 to 1531. He was a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya. Vallabha was the son of Laksmana Bhatta and Yellamma Garu and belong to a family of learned and devoted Telugu Vaishnavas living in Kakarvad. He was an extraordinary prodigy and mastered the Vedas and scriptures at an early age. Vallabha undertook many pilgrimages, covering all of India especially places of holy worship such as Benaras, Braj and Brindavan. He was a proponent of the worship of Bal-Krishna (Child Krishna) and preached Bhakti Marg is an entirely new way of Pushti (Grace). The Grace of the Lord alone will engender devotion in His followers and lead them to salvation.

Vallabha expounded his system of philosophy in the text Anu-Bhashya, his commentary on the Brahma Sutras. He called it Shuddha Advaita or pure monism as against Sankara's Kevala Advaita and Ramanuja's Visisht-Advaita.

### **Shuddha Advaita Darshan**

In Shuddha Advaita Darshan, Vallabha says that the entire universe is **real** and is **subtly Brahman**. The individual souls (Jivas) and the world (Jagat) are, in essence, one with Brahman. The world consists of *Kala* (time) and *Prakriti or Maya* which are in eternal existence, but have no separate existence apart from Brahman.

### **Concept of God**

According to Vallabha, God is the Absolute or the *Purushottama*. He is perfect, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent - Sat-Chit-Ananda. Vallabha explained that the Sruti texts which say that He has no attributes, mean that He does not have ordinary qualities.

God is real. There is no other reality besides Him. He is the only Being. He is the source for this universe and all souls. He is the first cause and the only cause. God is the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe. He creates the world by the mere force of His Will. Brahman manifests Himself, of His own Will, as the universe and the individual souls, but He does not undergo any change in His essential nature. Things come out of the Sat-Chit-Ananda, like sparks from fire.

The fundamental difference in Vallabha's philosophy from Sankara's is that he does not consider Maya to be separate like Sankara, and believes that the whole world of matter and souls is real and is only a subtle form of God - Brahman is the Creator of the world and **He is also the world** itself. Vallabha posits that those who bring Maya for the explanation of the world are not pure Advaitins, because they admit a second to Brahman (Supreme Reality). Vallabha holds that Brahman can create the world without any connection with such a principle as Maya, but Sankara traces the universe to Brahman through the power of Maya. Hence the philosophy of Vallabha is called pure monism or *Shuddha advaita*.

### **Concept of this World**

Creation is manifestation of Brahman and the universe is the effect of Brahman. The universe is as eternal and real as Brahman Himself and is not an illusory appearance. It is not different from Brahman in essence.

Jagat is the world of Nature. It is real and God Himself in one form. **But, the Samsara or temporal involvement is illusory.** This is created by the soul around its individuality or ego ('I'-ness). The separation from God on account of egoism makes the soul forget its original true, divine nature. Samsara is a product of the soul's imagination and action which play around its 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness'. On account of its selfishness, it puts itself in wrong relations with other souls and with the objective universe. It creates a web of its own and itself gets entangled in it.

**This** is an illusion, because the web has no reality. Vallabh explains that this samsara, the world of false relations created by the soul, is alone Maya. Samsara or Maya rises because the soul, which is not apart from God, tries to set itself up as an independent reality or entity in its own right. The self which is something apart from God is illusory. Its body is illusory and its world also is illusory and it is very different from the world of Nature.

### **Concept of Soul (Jiva)**

Jivas are the *Anshas* or parts of God. They issue from Him spontaneously as sparks from fire. Brahman is the whole. The Jiva or the individual soul is part; but, there is no real difference between Brahman and the individual soul, because **the individual soul is of identical essence with Brahman.** This differs from Ramanuja's Vishisht Advait, where the parts (souls) are really different from the whole (Brahman). Vallabha states that the soul is one with Brahman and is as real and eternal as Brahman.

The individual soul is itself Brahman, with the attribute of bliss being obscured or suppressed. When the soul attains bliss, and the inanimate world attains both consciousness and bliss, the difference between Brahman and these vanishes.

The soul is both a doer and an enjoyer. It is atomic in size, but it pervades the whole body by its quality of intelligence, just as sandalwood pervades even the places where it does not exist

through its sweet fragrance and just as a lamp, though confined only to a part of a room, illuminates the whole room.

### **Classification of Souls**

Vallabha offers two classifications of souls. The first is:

1. The pure (*Shuddha*) Jivas - in whom the divine qualities (*Aisvarya*) are not obscured by ignorance.
2. The worldly (*Samasarin*) Jivas - who are caught in the clutches of *Avidya* or ignorance. They experience births and deaths on account of their connection with gross and subtle bodies.
3. The liberated (*Mukta*) Jivas – who are free from the bonds of *Samsara* through *Vidya* or Knowledge.

When the soul attains the final emancipation, it recovers its suppressed qualities and becomes one with God or Brahman. The world appears as Brahman to one who has realised the Truth.

The second classification that Vallabha makes is of **Pushti, Maryada and Pravahika souls**. All these are different from one another in their origin, nature and final end. They all issue from God with these differences.

The Pravahika souls issue from the mind of God. They are the Samsaric Jivas. They are souls neither of grace nor of law. They are in continuous motion (*Pravaha*).

The Maryada souls are generated from the *Vak* or the Word of God. They are governed by law, not by grace. They perform their ritualistic duties, at first with selfish interests. Later on, they develop *Nishkarma-Bhava* and do their ritualistic routine without any self-interest. This purifies their mind. They reach the *Akshara*, which is a kind of vestibule to the abode of God. Afterwards they attain the supreme abode of God.

The Pushti souls are the highest, as they issue from the *Ananda-Kaya* of God. These souls are the *Ansha* (parts) of His body. God is the *Anshi* (the whole). These are the souls governed by grace. They have the divine seed in them which bears fruit in the end. They have communion and fellowship with Lord Krishna. develop *Bhakti* (devotion) and reach their final goal only through the grace of the Lord. *Bhakti* is the means and the end in itself.

These three kinds of souls have further sub-division and cross-divisions into Pushti-Pushti, Pushti-Maryada, Pushti-Pravahika, Maryada-Maryada, Maryada-Pushti, Maryada-Pravahika, Pravahika-Pravahika, Pravahika-Pushti and Pravahika-Maryada.

### **Path to Salvation**

The way of life and salvation preached by Vallabha is called Pushti Marga.

The soul of man has become weak and lean on account of sin. It is, therefore, in dire need of the grace of God for its uplift and emancipation. God's grace gives Pushti and Poshana and hence the name Pushti Marga or the Way of Grace is applied to this path to salvation.

The individual soul can attain the final emancipation only through the grace of God. Although Jnana is useful Bhakti is the chief means of salvation. Maha Pushti or the highest grace removes great obstacles and helps in the attainment of God. The Bhakti generated by special grace is known as Pushti Bhakti.

### **The Four Kinds of Bhakti**

This Pushti-Bhakti is of four kinds:

1.     Pravaha Pushti-Bhakti  
Pravaha Bhakti is the path of those who while leading the worldly life, perform works (Karma) which will lead to the attainment of God-realisation. Worldly life is compared to the flow of a river (Pravaha).
2.     Maryada Pushti-Bhakti  
Maryada Bhakti is the path of those who are rendered fit to attain knowledge (Jnana) which is useful for worship, through the grace of the Lord. They know all about the ways of God. They depend upon their own efforts to obtain knowledge.
3.     Pushti Pushti-Bhakti  
In Pushti-Bhakti, the devotees lead a life of self-restraint. They hear discourses about the Lord. They do Kirtana and repeatedly recite His name.
4.     Shuddha Pushti-Bhakti  
In Shuddha Pushti-Bhakti, the devotees do Kirtana and sing the Lord's name. They develop a strong passion for doing this. This kind of devotion is generated by the Lord Himself. The Lord's grace descends on the devotees after which they develop a liking for God. The different stages of the development of devotion are Bhava

(inclination), Prema (ecstatic love), Pranaya (love devoid of shyness or hesitation) and Sneha (personal affection borne of a softened and melted heart). These are all progressive steps towards Anuraga which is the most intense form of attachment to God, ending in Vyasana, which is a sense of God-inebriation wherein the world of every-day experience is practically replaced for the devotee, by a plane of existence where God, himself and devotees like himself only exist.

Vallabha posits the highest form of devotion as Atma Nivedanam, or complete self-surrender at the Feet of the Lord. Vallabha says that when love for Sri Krishna becomes intense, the devotee sees Lord Krishna everywhere. Hence everything becomes an object of love for him and he identifies himself with everything. The Gopis of Brindavan had this experience. This is a Para Bhakti or supreme devotion, which becomes akin to the knowledge or Brahma-Jnana of the Vedantins or Jnanis. The inner and outer world is full of Krishna or Purushottama for such devotees.

For those devotees who have developed Vyasana, or strong passion for God, the summum bonnum of life is not Mukti but eternal service of Lord Krishna and participation in His Leela in the celestial Brindavana. The devotees assume the forms of cows, birds, trees and rivers and enjoy the company of Sri Krishna. These sports are similar to those which Sri Krishna did in Vraja and Vrindavana.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have attempted to summarise the major philosophical points of the Shuddha Advaita school of thought of Sri Vallabhacharya, along the lines of the concept of God, World and Soul, as well as the prescribed path to salvation. Vallabha's teachings and his guidelines to his followers were reinforced by his disciples, which included Surdas and Gusainji, and he still has a strong following in Northern India, especially Rajasthan and Gujarat.