
UNIT 3 RAMANUJA

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit—is to provide a glimpse of another school of Vedanta known as Visistadvaita pioneered by Sri Ramanujacharya who systematised the conception of monotheism based on the *Prasthan Traya*. *Bhakti* as the sole means to liberation is its contention and hence Ramanuja and other gamut of Visistadvaitins dwell deep into the importance of *bhakti*. We shall examine the Epistemology, Metaphysical categories and Axiology according to Visistadvaita.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of philosophy of Visistadvaita;
- to differentiate it from other Schools of *Vedanta*;
- to learn the technical terms in Visistadvaita and familiarise with Sanskrit equivalents; and
- to appreciate the importance of *Bhakti* and *Prapatti*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Ramanuja was born (1017 A.D.) to Asuri Keshava Somayaji Deekshitar and Kanthimathi in Perumbadur village, Tamilnadu. From a very young age he displayed extraordinary brilliance and was compassionate towards all. Shortly after being married in his teenage years, and after his father died, Ramanuja and his family moved to the neighboring city of Kanchipuram. He took initiation from Yadavaprakasa, a renowned Advaitic scholar. The historical data states that since Ramanuja emphasised on *bhakti* as opposed to *jnana* of Advaitic Thought, Yadavaprakasa considered this as a threat to the philosophical school and he decided to kill the young Ramanuja. However, Ramanuja's cousin Govinda Bhatta discovered the plot and helped him escape. According to another version, one of Yadavaprakasa's students plotted to kill Ramanuja but he escaped in the aforementioned manner. Later, due to further controversial arguments, Yadavaprakasa asked Ramanuja to leave. Ramanuja's childhood mentor, Kanchipurna, suggested

him to meet Kanchipurna's own guru, Yamunacharya. Ramanuja travelled to Srirangam to meet an aging Yamunacharya, a philosopher of the vibrant Vishishtadvaita school of thought. Even before Ramanuja could meet Yamunacharya, he had died. According to the legend of the followers of Ramanuja, three fingers of Yamunacharya's corpse were folded. Ramanuja saw this and understood that Yamunacharya was concerned about three tasks and he vowed to complete them. The three tasks as described by Ramanuja are, firstly to teach the doctrine of surrender to God as the means to liberation, secondly to comment on the *Vedantasutras* in the light of Visistadvaita philosophy that has been transmitted orally to the disciples and thirdly the names of Sage Parashara and Saint Sathakopa be perpetuated. Legend goes that on hearing the vow, the three fingers on the corpse straightened. Ramanuja accepted Yamunacharya as his *Manasika Acharya* and spent six months learning the Philosophy of Visistadvaita as taught by Yamunacharya to his disciple Mahapurna. Ramanuja's wife disparaged Mahapurna's wife as belonging to a lower community. Mahapurna and his wife had to leave Srirangam. Ramanuja realized that his life as a householder was interfering with his philosophical pursuit and that he and his wife had differing views. He sent her to her parent's house and himself took to a mendicant life. Ramanuja started travelling the land, having philosophical debates with the custodians of various Vishnu temples. Many of them, after losing the debates, became his disciples. Ramanuja standardized the practices of these temples and worked for the development for Srivaishnava school of thought. He began his writings at this time. Ramanuja wrote nine works including his famous commentary on *Vedantasutra*, known as *Sri Bhashya*. The *Vedantasara* and *Vedantadipika* are brief commentaries to the *Vedantasutra*. He wrote an elaborate commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*. The other works are independent treatises elucidating the concepts of Visistadvaita. They are, *Vedarthasangraha*, *Nitya grantha* and three prose works expounding the glory of surrender as means to liberation. Ramanuja gained knowledge from five different people whom he considered as his acharyas, they are, Peria Nambigal, Thirukkotiyur Nambigal, Thirumalai Nambigal, Tirumalai Aandaa and Thirukachchi Nambigal, from each of whom he learnt various 'secrets' of Vaishnava tradition. It is said that Ramanuja faced threats from some Shaivite Chola rulers and had to move to the Hoysala kingdom of Jain king Bittideva and queen Shantala Devi in Karnataka. The legend states that Ramanuja cured the King's daughter of evil spirits and thereafter the Bittideva converted to Srivaishnavism and took the name Vishnuvardhana meaning "one who grows the sect of Vishnu". However, the queen and many of the ministers remained Jain and the kingdom was known for its religious tolerance. Ramanuja re-established the liturgy in the Cheluvanarayana temple in Melukote and King engaged in building many Vishnu temples. The popularity of Ramanuja spread far and wide and he had huge followers with the desire to attain Narayana. They took to the path of *bhakti* and lead a pious life. At a ripe age of 120, Ramanuja left his mortal coils and attained the abode of the Supreme Being in 1137 A.D. In fact, the followers of Srivaishnava tradition consider Ramanuja as an incarnation of Narayana to re-establish the Vaishnava teaching. Ramanuja's shrine (*sannidhi*) is located inside the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple, Srirangam, Tamil Nadu.

3.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

The ultimate is one, according to Visistadvaita, but is not the attributeless absolute since a Being devoid of attributes is imperceptible and logically untenable.

Visistadvaita admits of three fundamental realities, matter (*acit*), individual beings (*cit*) and God (*Ishvara*). The ultimate reality is one with *cit* and *acit* as its parts. Often the word 'Visistadvaita' is referred to as 'pan-en-theism', which means the ultimate God is different from and independent of the relative entities and yet as a whole, it includes the relative entities. The epistemological analysis is a pre-requisite to the metaphysical conclusion of Visistadvaita. Visistadvaitins admit three means of knowledge, viz, perception, inference and testimony.

Perception

As a Realist School, Visistadvaita describes perceptual knowledge as sensory contact with objects. In the process of perception, there is knowledge (*artha praksha*) that reveals an object, knower, object of knowledge and means of knowledge. The knowledge of the *jiva* flows out through the mind to the sense organs that come in contact with the object, there arises a perceptual cognition, like, 'there is a pot'. In this mechanism, Visistadvaitin states, knowledge can reveal only that object which is qualified by attributes. In this regard, perception is divided into two, first is indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) that cognises the object in the manner 'there is an object' and the second is determinate (*savikalpaka*) that grasps the other features of the object. In either case, the apprehension is because of attributes of the object. Since an object devoid of attributes is imperceptible, Visistadvaitin refuses to accept a transcendental absolute reality.

Theory of Erroneous Perception

Visistadvaitin holds on to the view that all knowledge is of the real. This theory is known as *yathartha khyati* or *satkhyati*. In case of illusory perception like, seeing 'silver' on a 'shell', Visistadvaitin explains based on the theory of evolution, wherein all the effects are combination of five elements. In a 'shell', there is predominantly shell-particles but it contains an infinitesimal part of 'silver', that is, the shell contains the 'brightness' of silver that makes the shell appear as silver. The knowledge has revealed the object as it is, that is silver in this case but knowledge has not fulfilled a second condition, that is, practicality. Since the infinitesimal silver in shell serves no purpose, this cognition of 'silver' in shell is known to be an error. Error relates only to the attributive consciousness of *jiva*. The error is due to the non-apprehension of the determinate characteristics of an object and of its difference from others. Error is a real experience due to a real cause and can be rectified by means of pragmatic verification.

Inference

Inferential cognition is defined as that which is the valid knowledge of the particular pervader (fire) obtained from the observation of the fact of smoke being invariably pervaded by fire. Visistadvaitin accepts the five-membered syllogism of proposition (*pratijna*), reason (*hetu*), instance (*udaharana*), application (*upanaya*) and conclusion (*nigamana*). All mediate knowledge is derived through inference.

Testimony

The scriptural statements or testimony is accepted as an independent means of knowledge by Visistadvaitins. The primary scriptures are the *prasthanaya traya*, but Visistadvaitins include *Puranas* and *Pancharatra Agamas* as equally authoritative and valid source of knowledge. The *Puranas* are classified as

sattvika, *rajasa* and *tamasa* and the *sattvika puranas* eulogise the greatness of Vishnu and hence they are taken to be the most authentic source. For Visistadvaitins, the *Pancharatra Agamas* hold a unique position since they are considered to be revealed by *Ishvara*. The theory of verbal knowledge as admitted by Visistadvaita signifies that the words have power to denote their respective meanings along with qualities or difference. The power of the word to denote an object is not limited to the quality alone but it indicates the substance also. This sense of denotation is known as ‘*aparyavasana vritti*’. The *cit* and *acit* are inseparable attributes of Brahman and hence every word indicates Brahman immanent in everything. Since all the words denote Brahman primarily, in this sense Brahman is known as ‘*sarva shabda vachya*’ Ramanuja explicates this based on the theory of grammatical coordination.

Visistadvaitins include comparison under memory. Comparison is based on three sources, perception, inference and verbal testimony and hence it is not accepted as a separate means of knowledge. Non-apprehension is categorised under perception and postulation is included in inference. Thus, according to Visistadvaita, the valid means of knowledge are only perception, inference and testimony.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Give an account of Life and works of Ramanujacharya.

2) Explain the epistemological dimension of Visistadvaita School of Thought.

3.3 METAPHYSICAL CATEGORIES

Visistadvaita is developed based on the concept of substance-attribute and it lays down three fundamental metaphysical concepts, namely, the concept of substance and attribute, the concept of relation and the concept of cause and effect. According to Visistadvaitin’s epistemological stand, a substance cannot be conceived devoid of attributes.

- The first concept is explained based on the principle of *aprthaksiddhi*, as an attribute is inseparable from its substance; a substance is also inseparable from its attributes. This implies two things, that attribute and substance cannot exist as two separate things and that attributes and substance cannot be comprehended distinctly. That which is devoid of attributes is a non-entity.
- The second concept of relation is obtained between substance and attribute and substance and substance. Thus, physical body and soul are inseparable substances. Similarly, *cit* and *acit* are inseparable from *Ishvara*.
- The third concept of cause and effect expounds how the 'one' became 'many'. The effect does not exist in the cause nor is it different from the cause. The two are different states of one and the same substance. This is a modified theory of *Satkaryavada*.

Based on the above three concepts, Visistadvaitins proceeds to explicate the metaphysical categories that is broadly divided as substance (*dravya*) and non-substance (*adravya*). The substances are six, divided as inert (*jada*) and non-inert (*ajada*), of which the non-inert entities are further classified as self-revealing (*pratyak*) and revelation for others (*parak*), of which *Jiva* and *Ishvara* are self-revealing non-inert substances and *nityavibhuti* and *jnana* are *parak*. The *prakriti* and *kala* are inert substances. The non-substances are ten, viz, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*, *shabda*, *sparsha*, *rupa*, *rasa*, *gandha*, *samyoga* and *shakti* which are the basic metaphysical attributes.

Dravya

Dravya is that which serves as a substratum of modification and modification is that which an adventitious quality inseparable from the substance. Visistadvaita presents a distinctive doctrine of *jiva*, that is different from Brahman and even in the state of liberation it does not lose its individuality. *Jivas* are infinite in number and they are essentially of the nature of knowledge. *Jiva* is the knower because it serves as the substrate of knowledge. The *jiva* constituting of knowledge is known as substantive-knowledge (*dharmijnana*) which is self-evident but does not reveal the external objects and it knows what is revealed to it. The *jnana* or knowledge by itself is an essential attribute of the *jiva*, which is known as attributive-knowledge (*dharmabhutajnana*). *Jnana* reveals itself and the external objects but does not know them. *Jiva* is a doer and reaper of results. It is of the dimension of an atom (*anu*). *Jiva* is different from *panchakoshas*. The *jivas* are eternal. Ramanuja, while commenting on the *Vedantasutra* establishes that *jiva* is neither different from nor identical with Brahman, but it is a part (*amsha*) of Brahman. The part-whole theory means, *jivas* are the essential attribute of a complex whole.

Visistadvaitin holds a theological philosophy and considers the ultimate reality as the personal God, *Narayana*, etymologically means the ground of *cit* and *acit*. Brahman or the ultimate reality is also referred to as *Vishnu*, etymologically meaning that which pervades everything. Ramanuja derives validity of its theology from the *Upanishads* and *Puranas*. The attributeless Brahman held by Advaitin is rejected as metaphysical abstraction and Brahman is conceived, by Visistadvaitin as God with attributes like possessing a bodily form, with infinite good qualities and glories. The bodily form of Brahman is not subject to *karma* like the *jivas*, but is assumed out of free-will for the benefit of the devotees. The bodily form of Brahman also known as *Ishvara* is eternal with pure quality

(*shuddha sattva*). The nature of Brahman is determined by five distinguishing characteristics, namely, Reality (*satyam*), Knowledge (*jnanam*), Infinite (*anantam*), Bliss (*anandam*) and Pure (*amalam*) based on Upanishadic statements. Visistadvaitin admits six attributes in *Ishvara*, viz, knowledge, strength, lordship, virility, power and splendour. God, for Visistadvaitins, manifest in five forms, the transcendental form (*para*), divine manifestation as *Vasudeva*, *Sankarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha* (*Vyuha*), several incarnations (*vibhava*), entering into the substance made by devotees (*archa*) and residing in the hearts of *jivas* (*antaryami*). The purpose of varied manifestations is to destroy evil and re-establish righteousness.

Prakriti or the primordial cosmic matter is an inert substance, eternal and subject to modification. It consists of three qualities, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It is controlled by *Ishvara* and is dependent on Him for its existence. According to the evolutionary process of Visistadvaitin, twenty-three categories evolve from *prakriti*, they are, *mahat*, *ahamkara*, from the *sattvika ahamkara* emerges *manas*, five senses of knowledge and action, from the *tamasa ahamkara* emanates the five *tanmatras* or subtle elements. The *rajasa ahamkara* serves as an aid for both the *sattvika* and *tamasa* in their evolution. The two stages of evolution in the form aggregate and gross is described. The first stage is regarded as the primary evolution of the aggregate universe (*samasthi srishthi*) and the second stage is the formation of the physical universe where the elements undergo the process of *panchikarana*. Visistadvaitin rejects the *vivartavada* of Advaitin and advocates the reality of the universe. The perceived world is not an appearance but an integral part of Brahman. Based on the third metaphysical concept of cause and effect, Brahman with *cit* and *acit* in subtle form is the cause and in manifested form is the effect. Ramanuja rejects the theory of illusion advocated by Advaitin on the grounds of seven untenabilities against the concept of *maya*. The seven untenabilities are elaborately discussed in *Sri bhasya*. According to Ramanuja, firstly the very nature of *maya* is subject to contradictions, secondly the inexplicable nature is illogical, thirdly, there is no means of knowledge in support of this theory of *maya*, the locus of *maya* cannot be ascertained as Brahman or *jiva*, fifthly, the obscuring nature of *maya* is unintelligible, sixthly there is untenability of removal of *maya* by valid knowledge, and finally, the very concept of the cessation of *maya* is illogical.

Nityavibhuti or *Shuddhasattva* is the transcendental matter in contrast to the *prakriti* that is the cosmic matter. It is a spiritual substance characterised by pure *sattva* unlike the physical matter which constitutes three *gunas*. It is non-material and insentient. It is classified under the *parak* and hence it illumines everything but does not know. Visistadvaitins accept *shuddhasatta* category since *Agamas* maintain that idols that are consecrated is permeated with *shuddhasattva* thus making the place of worship a spiritual sanctorum. Moreover, the bodily form of *Ishvara* cannot be made of cosmic matter that is subject to origination and destruction, but it is made of *shuddhasattva*. However, *Ishvara* is the controller of and substratum of both the *prakriti* and *shuddhasattva*.

Kala or the Time Principle is also one of the inert substances that is eternal. It is an independent and real substance but is not a part of *prakriti*. It exists along with *prakriti* without a beginning or an end. It is within the realm of Brahman and undergoes modification in the form of seconds, minutes, hours, days etc.

Adravya

The nature of ten *adravyas* is elaborated here. The *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are the three basic qualities of *prakriti*. *Sattva* stands for light and causes happiness. *Rajas* represents activity and causes suffering and *tamas* means inertia giving rise to ignorance. The attributes of the five elements namely sound, touch, sight, taste and smell is cognised by its corresponding sense organ. *Samyoga* or relation is a non-substance that brings together two things. There is *samyoga* between *purusha* and *prakriti* that result in the universe. The body and soul are together due to *samyoga* relation that varies from Brahma to a blade of grass. Knowledge takes place as a result of *samyoga* between intellect and external objects. This relation is possible between two all-pervasive substances like the relation of *Ishvara* and *kala* that is eternal.

Cause of Bondage

The *jivas* have fallen away from the Lord and are ignorant of the relation of themselves as the body of Narayana. This forgetfulness of *sharira-shariri sambandha* or the relation of part-whole unit leads to sorrow and bondage. Freedom is thus, gaining knowledge of the nature of self and attaining the feet of the Lord in his abode, *Vaikuntha*.

3.4 MEANS TO LIBERATION

Visistadvaitin maintains that *jiva* is an eternal individual being that remains in its true nature in the state of liberation with infinite knowledge, relishing the eternal bliss of Brahman. Thus, each *jiva* has to realise its highest goal of reaching *Narayana* and put forth effort to attain liberation. The *jivas* are classified, in Visistadvaita, as *baddha* or bound selves, *mukta* or released selves and *nitya* or eternally free ones. Those *jivas* who develop detachment towards ephemeral pleasures is said to be an aspirant of liberation. If the *jiva* knows the nature of five factors then with the grace of the Lord will attain liberation. The five factors (*arthapanchakam*) are nature of soul as subservient to God, nature of God as the ultimate and only reality, nature of goal as to attain the Lord and serve Him, nature of means being total surrender to win the grace of Lord, and the nature of obstacle as ignorance of the above four factors.

The means or *upaya* according to Visistadvaita is *bhakti* or an unceasing meditation with love on the Supreme Being. *Bhakti* is generated with total observance of religious duties as prescribed in the scriptures adhering to the classification of class and stages of life. *Bhakti* is preceded by *karma* and *jnana* and hence *karma* and *jnana* are subsidiary or subservient to *bhakti* and *bhakti* is the direct means to liberation, according to Visistadvaita. *Karma yoga* emphasises the performance of actions accepting any kind of consequence, sacrifice, charity and austerity as divine service to the Lord. *Jnana yoga* signifies control of mind and senses and dwelling incessantly meditating on the Lord. The subservient means enhances purity of mind and removes sins (*papa*) and thereby promotes *bhakti*. The *bhakti yoga* presupposes certain rigorous disciplines known as the seven means (*sadhana saptaka*) that is quoted by Ramanuja in his *Sri bhasya*. The disciplines are discrimination (*viveka*), wherein the seeker must pay careful attention to the kind of food consumed. It must be free from all kinds of impurities. Maintenance of purity of body is directly proportional to the purity of mind. The second discipline is control of passions (*vimoka*) is the attempt to free oneself

from the clutches of desire and anger cycle. The third discipline is practice (*abhyasa*) where a seeker puts forth effort to fix the mind upon the auspicious form of Brahman immanent in everything. This stage is often referred to as *dhyana yoga*. The fourth discipline is performance of five-fold duties (*kriya*). Here, the seeker continues the performance of duties towards God, Elders, Teachers, fellow-beings and the environment of plant and animal kingdom. This is considered as a means of purification of mind. The fifth discipline is development of virtues (*kalyana*). Ramanuja mentions most importantly six virtues to be cultivated by every seeker, they are, truthfulness, integrity, serving others, benevolence, non-violence, non-stealing. The sixth discipline is freedom from weakness (*anvasada*), that is, not allowing oneself overwhelmed with past bitter experiences that weaken the mind. The final discipline mentioned is freedom from excessive goodness (*anuddharsha*). The seeker should not allow oneself involved in too much of goodness or merits which is also an obstacle to *bhakti*. Thus, extreme indulgences should be avoided. Since *bhakti* is the direct means to liberation, according to Visistadvaita, it prescribes the process of development of highest devotion or *parabhakti* towards the Lord. Initially, one develops love for the Lord, caused by study of scriptures and by intimate association with other devotees. This is known as general devotion or *samanya bhakti*. Then one should rigorously practice *karma yoga* by accepting any consequence as the offering of the Lord. By gaining God's grace, one reflects upon the true nature of the individual self, is known as *atmanusandhana*. The next stage is the realisation of self as subservient to God, this is known as knowledge of being a part of Lord or *seshatvajnana*. The gradual progress to the next stage is realisation that the highest attainment is oneness with the Lord and *parabhakti* is that wherein one develops the utmost desire and determination to see the Lord. The concept of *prapatti* or total surrender to the Lord is also considered as the direct means to liberation. In fact, according to Visistadvaita, both *bhakti* and *prapatti* are two sides of a same coin and hence they function as the direct means to attain the feet of the Lord. These two means are however, different and distinct with a specific role in the spiritual development. The *bhakti* is considered as *sadhana bhakti* and *prapatti* is known as *sadhya bhakti*, that is, one is the means and the other is the end. In fact, at a later stage, the School emphasised the role of *prapatti* since *bhakti yoga* demands a high level quality that may distance many seekers from attempting to pursue liberation. Ramanuja derives the theistic philosophy from the *prasthanaya* and it remains to interpret the *mahavakya* '*tattvamasi*' since Advaitin had derived the non-dual nature of self from the *mahavakya*. According to Visistadvaita, such an interpretation is untenable. The word '*tat*' in the *mahavakya* refers to God having the entire universe as his body, and the word '*tvam*' refers to God having the individual beings as his body. Thus, *acit* and *cit* as attributes of God is revealed by these two words. Finally the verb '*asi*' in the *mahavakya* reveals the identity of the embodied in both, viz, God.

3.5 LIBERATION

Liberation for Visistadvaita is attaining the abode of *Narayana*. It is not merely freedom from bondage but it is a positive state of existence in the higher realm without losing individuality. The liberated soul attains omniscience and enjoys the unlimited bliss like the Lord. The *jiva* after liberation is not subject to *karma* and therefore knowledge manifests in its fullest. Like Advaita School, Ramanuja does not accept the concept of *jivanmukti* because the abode of Lord can be

attained only after exhaustion of all *karma* and fall of the physical body. The liberated *jiva* gains all the perfections of the Lord except that they remain atomic in size and does not gain the power to create, sustain or dissolve the universe.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) Examine the metaphysical categories of Visistadvaita.

[illegible]

- 2) What is liberation and the means to liberation according to Visistadvaita?

[illegible]

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Ramanuja's approach is an attempt to unite the personal theism with the philosophy of the Absolute. The system of Visistadvaita in the 11th century developed basically as a reaction to the Absolutism propagated by Advaita School that seems to leave behind the role of *bhakti* in the gamut of means to liberation. Ramanuja made an emphatic return of *bhakti*, a significant contribution of Visistadvaita by taking to Realism and retaining the theistic approach. There had been significant development prior to Ramanuja and post-Ramanuja which does not find scope in this unit. The two broad views earlier to Ramanuja namely, the non-dual system and school of thought that holds difference-cum-non-difference has been beautifully synthesised by Ramanuja, in his system that is widely known as 'Qualified Monism'. In keeping with the Realistic approach we have touched upon the epistemological theory of Visistadvaita that presents its theory of error in a unique manner. We had a brief view on the metaphysical concepts and categories that constitutes the crux of Visistadvaita School. The Liberation stressed by Visistadvaita presupposes a disciplined life and total commitment that is in a way need of the hour.

3.7 KEY WORDS

<i>Artha prakasha</i>	:	manifestation of object
<i>Dharmabhutajnana</i>	:	knowledge as an essential attribute of the Self
<i>Sharira-shariri sambandha</i> :	the organic relation of the body to the soul and of the cosmic universe of <i>cit</i> and <i>acit</i> to <i>Ishvara</i> , according to Ramanuja.	
<i>Satkaryavada</i>	:	a view that an effect is a modified state of the causal substance according to Visistadvaita.
<i>Yatharthakhyati</i>	:	the theory that all knowledge is of the real.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Ramanuja was born (1017 A.D.) to Asuri Keshava Somayaji Deekshitar and Kanthimathi in Perumbadur village, Tamilnadu. From a very young age he displayed extraordinary brilliance and was compassionate towards all. Shortly after being married in his teenage years, and after his father died, Ramanuja and his family moved to the neighboring city of Kanchipuram. He took initiation from Yadavaprakasa, a renowned Advaitic scholar. The historical data states that since Ramanuja emphasised on *bhakti* as opposed to *jnana* of Advaitic Thought, Yadavaprakasa considered him as a threat and asked Ramanuja to leave. Ramanuja travelled to Srirangam but before his meeting the teacher died. According to the legend of the followers of Ramanuja, three fingers of Yamunacharya's corpse were folded. The three tasks as described by Ramanuja are, firstly to teach the doctrine of surrender to God as the means to liberation, secondly to comment on the *Vedantasutras* in the light of Visistadvaita philosophy that has been transmitted orally to the disciples and thirdly the names of Sage Parashara and Saint Sathakopa be perpetuated. Legend goes that on hearing the vow, the three fingers on the corpse straightened. He took to a mendicant life and traveled the land, having

philosophical debates with the custodians of various Vishnu temples. He standardized the practices of these temples and worked for the development for Srivaishnava school of thought. Ramanuja wrote nine works including his famous commentary on *Vedantasutra*, known as *Sri Bhashya*. It is said that Ramanuja faced threats from some Shaivite Chola rulers and had to move to the Hoysala kingdom of Jain king Bittideva and queen Shantala Devi in Karnataka. Ramanuja cured the King's daughter of evil spirits and thereafter the Bittideva converted to Srivaishnavism and engaged himself in building Vishnu temples. The popularity of Ramanuja spread far and wide and he had huge followers with the desire to attain Narayana. They took to the path of *bhakti* and lead a pious life. At a ripe age of 120, Ramanuja left his mortal coils and attained the abode of the Supreme Being in 1137 A.D.

- 2) Visistadvaita admits of three fundamental realities, matter (*acit*), individual beings (*cit*) and God (*Ishvara*). The ultimate reality is one with *cit* and *acit* as its parts. As a Realist School, Visistadvaita describes perceptual knowledge as sensory contact with objects. The knowledge of the *jiva* flows out through the mind to the sense organs that come in contact with the object, there arises a perceptual cognition, like, 'there is a pot'. In this mechanism, Visistadvaitin states, knowledge can reveal only that object which is qualified by attributes. In this regard, perception is divided into two, first is indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) that cognises the object in the manner 'there is an object' and the second is determinate (*savikalpaka*) that grasps the other features of the object. In either case, the apprehension is because of attributes of the object. Since an object devoid of attributes is imperceptible, Visistadvaitin refuses to accept a transcendental absolute reality.

Visistadvaitin holds on to the view that all knowledge is of the real. This theory is known as *yathartha khyati* or *satkhyati*. In case of illusory perception like, seeing 'silver' on a 'shell', Visistadvaitin explains based on the theory of evolution, wherein all the effects are combination of five elements. In a 'shell', there is predominantly shell-particles but it contains an infinitesimal part of 'silver', that is, the shell contains the 'brightness' of silver that makes the shell appear as silver. The knowledge has revealed the object as it is, that is silver in this case but knowledge has not fulfilled a second condition, that is, practicality. Since the infinitesimal silver in shell serves no purpose, this cognition of 'silver' in shell is known to be an error. Error relates only to the attributive consciousness of *jiva*. The error is due to the non-apprehension of the determinate characteristics of an object and of its difference from others. Error is a real experience due to a real cause and can be rectified by means of pragmatic verification.

Inferential cognition is defined as that which is the valid knowledge of the particular pervader (fire) obtained from the observation of the fact of smoke being invariably pervaded by fire. Visistadvaitin accepts the five-membered syllogism of proposition (*pratijna*), reason (*hetu*), instance (*udaharana*), application (*upanaya*) and conclusion (*nigamana*). All mediate knowledge is derived through inference.

The scriptural statements or testimony is accepted as an independent means of knowledge by Visistadvaitins. The primary scriptures are the *prasthanatraya*, but Visistadvaitins include *Puranas* and *Pancharatra Agamas* as

equally authoritative and valid source of knowledge. The *Puranas* are classified as *sattvika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa* and the *sattvika puranas* eulogise the greatness of Vishnu and hence they are taken to be the most authentic source. For Visistadvaitins, the *Pancharatra Agamas* hold a unique position since they are considered to be revealed by *Ishvara*. The theory of verbal knowledge as admitted by Visistadvaita signifies that the words have power to denote their respective meanings along with qualities or difference. The power of the word to denote an object is not limited to the quality alone but it indicates the substance also. This sense of denotation is known as '*aparyavasana vritti*'. The *cit* and *acit* are inseparable attributes of Brahman and hence every word indicates Brahman immanent in everything. Since all the words denote Brahman primarily, in this sense Brahman is known as '*sarva shabda vachya*' Ramanuja explicates this based on the theory of grammatical coordination.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Visistadvaita is developed based on the concept of substance-attribute and it lays down three fundamental metaphysical concepts, namely, the concept of substance and attribute, the concept of relation and the concept of cause and effect. According to Visistadvaitin's epistemological stand, a substance cannot be conceived devoid of attributes. Visistadvaitin's metaphysical categories is broadly divided as substance (*dravya*) and non-substance (*adravya*). *Dravya* is that which serves as a substratum of modification and modification is that which an adventitious quality inseparable from the substance. The infinite *Jivas* are the substances who are essentially of the nature of knowledge. The *jnana* or knowledge by itself is an essential attribute of the *jiva*, which is known as attributive-knowledge (*dharmabhutajnana*). *Jiva* is a doer and reaper of results. It is of the dimension of an atom (*anu*). Ramanuja, while commenting on the *Vedantasutra* establishes that *jiva* is neither different from nor identical with Brahman, but it is a part (*amsha*) of Brahman. Visistadvaitin holds a theological philosophy and considers the ultimate reality as the personal God, *Narayana*. God with attributes like possessing a bodily form, with infinite good qualities and glories is accepted by Visistadvaita. The bodily form of Brahman also known as *Ishvara* is eternal with pure quality (*shuddha sattva*). God, for Visistadvaitins, manifest in five forms, the transcendental form (*para*), divine manifestation as *Vasudeva*, *Sankarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha* (*Vyuha*), several incarnations (*vibhava*), entering into the substance made by devotees (*archa*) and residing in the hearts of *jivas* (*antaryami*). The purpose of varied manifestations is to destroy evil and re-establish righteousness. *Prakriti* or the primordial cosmic matter is an inert substance, eternal and subject to modification. It consists of three qualities, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It is controlled by *Ishvara* and is dependent on Him for its existence. According to the evolutionary process of Visistadvaitin, twenty-three categories evolve from *prakriti*, they are, *mahat*, *ahamkara*, from the *sattvika ahamkara* emerges *manas*, five senses of knowledge and action, from the *tamasa ahamkara* emanates the five *tanmatras* or subtle elements. The *rajasa ahamkara* serves as an aid for both the *sattvika* and *tamasa* in their evolution. The two stages of evolution in the form aggregate and gross is described. *Nityavibhuti* or *Shuddhasattva* is the transcendental matter in contrast to the *prakriti* that is the cosmic matter. *Kala* or the Time Principle is also one of the inert substances that is

eternal. The ten *adravyas* are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, the five senses, *Samyoga* and *shakti*.

- 2) The means or *upaya* according to Visistadvaita is *bhakti* or an unceasing meditation with love on the Supreme Being. *Bhakti* is preceded by *karma* and *jnana*. *Karma yoga* emphasises the performance of actions accepting any kind of consequence, sacrifice, charity and austerity as divine service to the Lord. *Jnana yoga* signifies control of mind and senses and dwelling incessantly meditating on the Lord. The subservient means enhances purity of mind and removes sins (*papa*) and thereby promotes *bhakti*. The *bhakti yoga* presupposes certain rigorous disciplines known as the seven means (*sadhana saptaka*) that is quoted by Ramanuja in his *Sri bhasya*. Since *bhakti* is the direct means to liberation, according to Visistadvaita, it prescribes the process of development of highest devotion or *parabhakti* towards the Lord. Initially, one develops love for the Lord, caused by study of scriptures and by intimate association with other devotees. This is known as general devotion or *samanya bhakti*, gradually leading to *parabhakti* wherein one develops the utmost desire and determination to see the Lord. The concept of *prapatti* or total surrender to the Lord is also considered as the direct means to liberation. Liberation for Visistadvaita is attaining the abode of *Narayana*. The liberated *jiva* gain all the perfections of the Lord except that they remain atomic in size and does not gain the power to create, sustain or dissolve the universe.