

CHAPTER XI

The Doctrine of Acintya-bhedābheda

Philosophical thinking in regard to the problem of relation between God and man, the Absolute and the world of finite experience, the noumena and the phenomena, is directed along two main lines. Some, emphasising the essential distinction between the infinite and the finite, accept the absolute transcendence of the one over the other, while others, emphasising the identity between them regard God as immanent in the human spirit and the phenomenal world.

The view of God as transcendent gained prominence in Europe with the rise of individualism in the eighteenth century. Locke was chiefly responsible for shaping the thought of this century in England and France, and Leibnitz in Germany. To Locke God was an extra-mundane deity, having no connection with man and the finite world; to Leibnitz He was the monad of monads, the supreme monad, absolutely self-sufficient and eternally shut up from other beings and monads. Both Locke and Leibnitz denied any kind of relation between God and man.

The difficulties of this kind of philosophy are obvious. Too much stress upon the transcendence of God gives rise to a kind of mechanical deism; God is reduced to a great first cause. Like a watch-maker, he creates the machinery of the world once for all, and, without interfering with it any more, merely contents himself by 'seeing it go.' Apart from the fact that such a God hardly suits the religious conscience, the deistic position involves an unbridgeable gulf between God and man and undermines the notion of the essential unity of all beings. Thus, Leibnitz finds himself at a loss to explain the unity or the harmony of things, and is led, in the end, to account for the same by his belief in the pre-established harmony of the universe. Besides, dualism and pluralism are the necessary outcome of the philosophy of transcendence, and these imply limitation on the absolute freedom and infinite perfection of God. Insistence on transcendence leads to an incurable agnosticism in Kant: the universe is bifurcated into noumena and phenomena, the world within experience and the world beyond it; God is regarded as a reality that belongs to the noumenal world as the unknowable thing-in-itself, in all its pristine purity, which human reason dare not touch and contaminate.

Immanence is emphasised by Hegel. He revolts against the agnosticism of Kant and insists on the immanence of divine reason in the world. But, undue emphasis on immanence in Hegel leads to the identification of

God with the world of experience. The world is regarded as the thought of God and the different finite thinkers as functions or modes of one universal self-consciousness. The finite souls are deprived of their independent existence and made the shadows of God.

From another point of view, by identifying the process of human experience with divine experience, Hegel virtually denies any actuality of God for himself. He regards the history of humanity as a necessary process, through which God becomes self-conscious. His doctrine of evolution is undoubtedly one of his most important contributions to philosophy, but his identification of the divine sources and the goal of evolution with its highest human manifestations, brings him down to the level of the materialistic position. God is no more self-subsistent, but depends for his existence on the appearance of man: the appearance of man is identical with the creation of God.

Bradley tries to extricate the Hegelian absolute from this difficulty by insisting on its independent existence and its absolute transcendence of our categories of thought and 'being.' This leads to pantheism, or acosmism, which is to admit an undifferentiated, all-pervading substance as the only reality and to reject the finite existence as a species of illusion.

In western philosophy pantheism finds expression chiefly in the philosophy of Spinoza and Neo-Platonism, while in Indian philosophy it finds its chief exponent in Śaṅkara. Both Spinoza and Śaṅkara, instead of explaining the relation between the finite and the infinite, explain it away by cancelling one of the terms in the relation. Spinoza describes the finite as the manifestation of the attributes of the undifferentiated substance, which do not really belong to it, but are superimposed upon it. Śaṅkara describes it as the result of *upādhis*. Since the nature of a falsehood, illusion, or *upādhi* is that it does not exist, there can be no problem of relation between that which exists and that which does not exist. But the problem, which the pantheist tries thus to dismiss, returns for him in another and a more difficult form. For, though the finite is sought to be eliminated as non-existent, it persists in the form of its appearance, which cannot be denied, and the problem of relation between the finite and the infinite reappears in the form of the problem of relation between appearance and reality, which Spinoza and Śaṅkara fail to solve.

The history of philosophy bears evidence that neither immanence nor transcendence can solve the problem of relation between God and the world. The concepts of identity and difference are both inadequate to describe the nature of being. Exclusive emphasis on the one leads to a virtual denial of the world as illusion, while exclusive emphasis upon the other bifurcates the reality into two and creates an unbridgeable gulf between God and the world. Both the concepts, however, seem to be equally necessary. Identity is a necessary demand of reason and difference is an undeniable fact of experience. An ideal synthesis of identity

and difference must be the cherished goal of philosophy. But the synthesis, though necessary, is not possible or conceivable.

This is the final test of human logic. It fails. But the logic of the infinite succeeds where our human logic fails. In the perfect being there is no conflict between necessity and possibility. Here, what is necessary actually is.

The clue to the solution of the problem, according to the school of Śrī Caitanya, therefore, lies in the inconceivable power (*acintya-śakti*) of God, by which the concepts of identity and difference are transcended and reconciled in a higher synthesis. Transcendence and immanence are made the associated aspects of an abiding unity in God, or, in other words, in the doctrine of *Acintya-bhedābheda*, which is the distinguishing feature of the school of Śrī Caitanya.¹ The immanent aspect of God is called *Paramātmān*, while God, with all His splendour of infinite perfection, infinite potencies, and infinite attributes, transcending all the finite things, is called Bhagavān. As *Paramātmān* he is the immanent regulator and observer of the actions of the finite souls, and the unifier of all existing things; as Bhagavān he is the Blissful Personal Absolute, beyond and above the world of sense. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Dās Kavirāja cites the *Gītā* text IX, 4-5, to support this view of transcendence and immanence of God and the concept of *Acintya-śakti*, which makes simultaneous existence of transcendence and immanence possible.²

The transcendence and immanence of Brahman may be explained without reference to his Śakti by saying that Brahman is immanent by one part and transcendent by another, but this would be introducing internal difference (*svagata-bheda*) in Brahman, who is *advaya*. The very idea of part and whole, according to which one part excludes another, is repugnant to the nature of Brahman as *advaya*.

Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin illustrates the simultaneous presence of identity and difference in Brahman by referring to the fact that Kṛṣṇa lived with his sixteen thousand wives in their separate houses simultaneously.³

That nothing is impossible for Brahman on account of his *Acintya-śakti* is implied by *Brahman-sūtra*: *ātmani caivam vicitraśca*.⁴ But the following *Śloka* of *Mahābhārata* states it clearly:

*acintyaḥ khalu ye bhāvā na taṁstarkena yojayeta/
prakṛtibhyāḥ param yattu tadacintyasya lakṣṇam||*

¹SS, p. 149; CC, Madhya, VI, 170-71.

²*ei mata Gītā te punaḥ punaḥ kaya/*

sarvadā īśvara tattva acintya śakti haya||

āmī ta jagate basi jagat āmāte/

na āmī jagate basi na amā jagate|| CC, Ādi, V, 88-89.

³*Saṁkṣepa-bhāgavatāmṛtaṁ*, I, 365-66, 370-71.

⁴*Br. S.*, 1, 4, 26.

Therefore, it is possible for Brahman to be both different from the world and identical with it, to create the world out of himself and remain out of it. This cannot be explained by reasoning. But Śrī Caitanya tries, in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, to make it comprehensible to Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya by using the example of *Cintāmaṇi* (the philosopher's stone), which produces gold out of itself and yet remains unchanged.¹ In course of his discussion with Prakāśānanda also he uses this example and says that if a worldly object can have such *Acintya-śakti*, why should anyone be surprised at the *Acintya-śakti* of God.²

In his *Bhagavat-saṁdarbha*, Śrī Jīva defines Acintya as the power which can reconcile the impossible (*durghata ghatakatvam hyacintyatvam*).³ Again, commenting on *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* verses I, VI, 1-3, he interprets the word Acintya as that which, though incomprehensible on account of the contradictory notions of identity and difference it involves, can be realised by *arthāpatti* (logical implication).⁴

Therefore, he proceeds to prove the doctrine of Acintya-bhedābheda by *arthāpatti*. He shows how it is implied in the concept of Śakti, inherent in the philosophy of the school. Śakti is different from the object in which it inheres, because it cannot be conceived as identical with it; it is identical with the object, because it cannot be conceived as different from it. Simultaneous existence of identity and difference is *acintya*, or inconceivable, because it is contradictory.⁵

Śrī Jīva illustrates the relation of inconceivable identity-in-difference by referring to fire and its power. We cannot think of fire without the power of burning; similarly, we cannot think of the power of burning without fire. Both are identical. Fire is nothing except that which burns; the power of burning is nothing except fire in action. At the same time, fire and its power of burning are not absolutely the same. If they were absolutely the same, there would be no sense in warning the child of its power to burn by saying 'fire burns.' It would be enough to say 'fire.' 'Fire burns' would involve needless repetition, for 'fire' would mean the same thing as 'burns.' Besides, if there were no difference between fire and its power, it would not be possible to neutralise the power of burning in fire by means of medicines or *mantra*, without making fire disappear altogether.⁶

¹*acintya śakti īśvara jagadrūpa pariṇata//
maṇi jaiche avikṛte prasave hema bhāra/
jagadrūpa haya īśvara tabu avikāra/* CC, Madhya, VI, 170-71.

²*prākṛta vastu te jadi acintya śakti haya/
īśvarera acintya śakti ithe ki vismaya?//* CC, Ādi, VII, 120.

³*Bh. S.*, XVI.

⁴*bhinnābhinnatv-ādī-vikalpaścintayitum akṣyaḥ kevalam arthāpatti-jñāna-gocarāḥ.*

⁵vide *SS*, pp. 36-37.

⁶*SS*, pp. 36-37.

Just as there is neither absolute identity nor absolute difference between fire and its power, there is neither absolute identity nor absolute difference between Brahman and his Śakti. If there were absolute identity between Brahman and his Śakti, there would be absolute identity between Brahman and his different forms, which are the result of his Śakti, and the statements of the scriptures, describing the different forms of Brahman, like the *Jnātaścaturvidho rāśih Śloka* of *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*,¹ mentioning *Para-brahman*, *Īśvara*, *Viśvarūpa* and *Līlā-murti* as the four forms of Brahman, would be tautological. Absolute identity would mean absolute identity between Brahman and the individual souls or between Brahman and the world. The faults of the Jīvas and the world would then be the faults of Brahman. To keep Brahman free from these faults, it would be necessary to regard the Jīvas and the world as illusory. But, in the absence of any other real thing, Brahman will have to be regarded as the seat of illusion. Thus, Brahman would still not be faultless. Besides, the belief in absolute identity will falsify the *Śruti* texts which clearly distinguish the Jīvas and the world from Brahman.

If Brahman and his Śakti are regarded as absolutely different, that would give rise to dualism and the principle of oneness of all things (*advayatva*) stressed by the Śāstras and implied in logical thinking, would be contradicted. It would also not be possible for Brahman to appear in the four different forms mentioned above by his own power or Śakti. If he appears in these forms as a result of the Śakti of other things, his freedom would be compromised. Absolute difference would also contradict the *Śruti* text *parāśya śaktirvividhaiva srūyate svabhāvikī jñāna bala kriyā ca*,² because in this text *jñāna*, *bala* and *kriyā* have been described as *svabhāvikī* or internal Śaktis of Brahman.³

Śrī Jīva has explained, with reference to the Bhāgavata text *Jñāna-vijnānanidhaye brahmaṇeananta-śaktaye*,⁴ that the view relating to absolute identity is as illogical as the one relating to absolute difference. In the former case the word 'Brahman' would signify both Śakti and Śaktimān, and it would be tautological to describe Brahman as *Jñāna-vijnānanidhi* or *ananta-śakti sampanna*. In the latter it would not be possible to ascribe these predicates to Brahman at all.

Similarly, there are other statements of Śrutis which cannot be adequately explained without postulating *Acintya-bhedābheda*. *Vijnānam ānandam Brahman*⁵ is one such statement. Śrī Jīva asks: Are *vijnāna* and *ānanda* synonymous? If they are synonymous, the statement would be tautolo-

¹VP, 6, 7.

²vide *Svetāśvatara*, 6, 8.

³vide *SS*, p. 35.

⁴*Bh.*, 10, 16, 40.

⁵*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, III, 9, 28.

gical; if they have different meanings, it would introduce internal difference (*svagata-bheda*) in Brahman, which would contradict its oneness or *advayatva*.¹

But it may be asked if the relation of *bhedābheda* between God and the world can be thus explained, why should it be called *acintya*? The answer is that the relation itself is not thus explained. What is explained is that it involves both *bheda* and *abheda*. How exactly the two are reconciled is beyond our comprehension. The analogies of material objects, like the sun and its rays, fire and its heat, and musk and its smell, are employed to explain the *acintyatva* (inconceivability) and not the relation. What is intended to be emphasised by means of these examples is that both *bheda* and *abheda* are actually present, though logical thinking precludes their co-presence in the same object, and that the relation of *acintya bhedābheda* is unlimited in scope. It applies not only to God and His *śaktis*, but also to the material objects and their *śaktis*.² Jīva states this clearly in his commentary on *Śrīmad-bhāgavata*.³

The inconceivability of the relation is evident from the contradiction it involves. But there is also another reason for calling it inconceivable in the case of God and His *Śaktis*. It is so called because the relation cannot be adequately described in terms of the relation between the part and the whole, or substance and attribute, or even in terms of the relation between an ordinary object and its *Śakti*. For, in the case of God, the part is not merely a part and the *śakti* is not merely a *śakti*. The part and the whole, the *śakti* and the *śaktimān* (the possessor of *Śakti*), interpenetrate and form an undivided whole.⁴ God is essentially *advaya jñānatattva*, though not a pure identity. He appears in many forms and yet he is One; His *līlā*, name and form are at once different and non-different. Even the different parts of His body are different yet non-different, for each part can perform the functions of the other parts and of the whole. The part is, thus, actually identical with the whole, though still a part, and as such different from the whole.

The concept of *acintya* is found in numerous *Śruti* texts. The *Māndūkya-upaniṣad*,⁵ *Kaivalya-upaniṣad*,⁶ and *Subāla-upaniṣad*⁷ describe Brahman as *acintya*. The *Gītā* also describes him as *acintyarūpa*.⁸

¹SS, p. 38.

²*Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, 1, 3, 2.

³Jīva on *Śrīmad-bhāgavata*, 11.3.37.

⁴vide *Par. Saṁ.*, 34: Jīva on the *Bhāgavata* text *parasparānu-praveśāt tattvānām puruṣarṣabha*, XI, 22, 7.

⁵vide *Māndūkya-upaniṣad*, 1.

⁶vide *Kaivalya-upaniṣad*, 1, 6.

⁷vide *Subāla-upaniṣad*, Khaṇḍa VIII.

⁸vide *Gītā*, VIII, 9.

The *Brahma-sūtra* texts *sruteṣu śabdāmūlatvāt*¹ and *ātmini caivam vicitrāśca hi*² have a similar meaning. Śaṅkara, commenting upon the former, says, "Even certain ordinary things, such as gems, spells, herbs and the like, possess powers, which, owing to difference of time, place, occasion, and so on, produce various opposite effects, and nobody, unaided by instruction, is able to find out by mere reflection the number of these powers, their favouring conditions, their objects, their purposes, etc.; how much more impossible is it to conceive, without the aid of scripture, the true nature of Brahman, with its powers unfathomable by thought! As the *Purāṇa* says, 'Do not apply reasoning to what is unthinkable! The mark of the unthinkable is that it is above all material causes.'³ Therefore, the cognition of what is supersensuous is based on the holy texts only."

We must, however, distinguish the concept of *acintya*, as understood in the Caitanya school, from the concept of *anirvacanīya* (indescribable) in the Advaita-vedānta of Śaṅkara. *Brahman* and his *Śakti*, according to the former, are *acintya*, but not *anirvacanīya*. The *acintya* is that which is illogical, but which we have to accept on the basis of the holy texts. This meaning of *acintya* is supported by Śaṅkara's own commentary on the *Brahman-sūtra* quoted above. Śrīdhara, in his commentary on the *Gītā* text quoted above explains the *Acintya-rūpa* (Inconceivable form) as that which cannot be conceived because it is infinite and immeasurable.⁴ This does not imply that the *acintya* cannot be described, as the concept of *anirvacanīya* does, but that its infinitude, which implies the inclusion of contradictory qualities in it, cannot be properly understood. The scriptures describe Brahman as 'the greatest of the great' and 'the smallest of the small,'⁵ as 'one who moves and yet moves not,'⁶ as 'one who is far as well as near, immanent as well as transcendent,' and as one who does not have the mind or sense organs like ours and yet performs all the functions of these.⁷ These are descriptions of the *acintya-rūpa* of Brahman, which we cannot comprehend.

Śaṅkara's category of '*anirvacanīya*' is applicable to *Māyā* and its products, which can neither be described as real nor as unreal; it does not apply to Brahman, who is described as real. But the category of *acintya*, in the school of Śrī Caitanya, applies to the relation between *Śakti* and *Śaktimān* everywhere, irrespective of the consideration whether it pertains to things in the phenomenal world or the transcendental world. It applies

¹Br. S., II, 1, 27.

²ibid., II, 1, 28.

³vide *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma Parva, V, 12.

⁴*aparimita-mahimatvādacintyarūpaṁ*.

⁵*aṇoraṇīyāna mahato mahīyāna*. Svet. Up., III, 20.

⁶vide *Isāvāsya*, 5.

⁷vide Svet. Up., III, 19.

to Brahman, His associates (*parikaras*), and abodes (*dhāmans*), as much as it applies to the Jivas and the objects of the physical world. *Anirvacanīya* is a negative concept, while *acintya* is a positive concept. *Anirvacanīya* signifies the coming together of the opposite concepts of 'reality' and 'unreality' which cancel each other to produce illusion. *Acintya* signifies the marriage of the opposite concepts of 'difference' and 'non-difference' leading to a higher and a fuller unity. The concept of *Anirvacanīya* is born out of respect for the Law of Contradiction. We refuse to describe an object and call it *Anirvacanīya* when it seems to violate this law. The concept of *acintya* is born out of respect for scriptural authority, which ignores the law of contradiction. The former is based on logic, the latter on *Srutārthāpatti*.

Acintya should also be distinguished from the category of *avaktavyam* (indiscribable) in the *Saptabhaṅgī-naya* of the Jains. The third form of judgement in the *Saptabhaṅgī-naya* 'somehow *S* is *P* and also is not *P*' (*syāt asti ca nāsti ca*), predicates incompatible characters of the subject successively, from different points of view. The fourth form 'somehow *S* is indescribable' (*syāt avaktavyam*), represents the predication of incompatible characters of the subject in general, that is, without making any distinction of standpoints, on account of which the subject is regarded as indescribable. The third form says that incompatible characters can be predicated of the same thing successively, from different standpoints, or in different aspects. The fourth form says that incompatible characters cannot be predicated of the same thing simultaneously from the same standpoint and in the same aspect. But, according to the doctrine of *Acintya-bhedābheda*, incompatible characters can sometimes be predicated of the same subject from the same standpoint and in the same aspect. *Avaktavyam* conforms to the Law of Contradiction, while *Acintya* transcends it.

Dr. Radha Govind Nath has raised the question as to whether the word '*acintya*' in '*acintya-bhedābheda*' has been used by Śrī Jīva to qualify the relation of *bhedābheda* or the Śakti of Brahman? He believes that '*acintya*' relates to the relation of *bhedābheda*, because Śrī Jīva has not specifically mentioned 'Brahman' in this connection¹ and has cited the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* text '*śaktyaḥ sarvabhāvānāma-cintyajnānagocaraḥ*' which makes a mention of the *Acintya-śakti* of all the objects and not only Brahman.² We agree with Dr. Radha Govind Nath that the doctrine of *Acintya bhedābheda* relates to Śakti and *Śaktimat* (the possessor of Śakti) in general, but we hold that it relates primarily to the *Acintya-śakti* of Brahman and only secondarily to the *Acintya-śakti* of objects in general. There are two special reasons for this:

¹ *svamateriv acintya-bhedābhedaveva acintyaśaktimayatvāditi*, SS. p. 149.

² *ibid*, pp. 36-37.

Firstly, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmin has expounded the doctrine of *Acintya-bhedābheda* in the context of the problem of relation between God and the world, and not in the context of the problem of relation between objects and their powers in general. Śrī Caitanya has also made a mention of the Acintya-śakti of Bhagavān in the same connection, and used the example of Cintāmaṇi and its power, only to say that if a worldly object can have Acintya-śakti, Acintya-śakti of God can be easily taken for granted.

Secondly, if the doctrine of *Acintya-bhedābheda* was taken to imply the Acintya-śakti of objects in general, the relation of difference and non-difference between God and the world would no doubt proceed as a deduction from the general rule. But the problem of preserving God's purity in spite of His relation with the world would still remain unsolved, there being nothing in the general rule to help solve it. On the other hand under the general rule, God cannot remain unaffected by the power of the individual souls, emanating from His Jīva-śakti, to perform good or bad deeds. It is only the *acintya-śakti* of God that can reconcile transcendence with immanence in such a manner that his purity remains unaffected by His relation with the phenomenal world.

Acintya-bhedābheda and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara

Śaṅkara's philosophy, usually known as *Kevalādvaita*, is summed-up in the trite phrase *brhman satyam jagannmithyā*, which means that Brahman is real and the world is an illusion. Brahman is *advaya*, one without a second; nothing at all exists besides Brahman, whether inside it, as its part or attribute, or outside it. It is a pure unity, absolutely homogenous in nature (*kūṭastha*); it is pure existence and pure consciousness. Consciousness or thought is not its attribute, it is thought or intelligence itself (*Jñāna-svarūpa*).

But, if nothing else exists, whence the appearance of the physical world and the individual beings like ourselves? To answer this question, Śaṅkara introduces in his philosophy the theory of *Māyā* and the distinction between the esoteric (*pāramārthika*) and exoteric (*vyāvaharika*) points of view. Brahman is without any attributes (*nirguṇa*) from the esoteric or transcendental point of view, but from the exoteric or worldly point of view, it is qualified (*saguṇa*) and possesses the magical creative power called *Māyā*. The Saguṇa Brahman or Īśvara conjures up the world-show through His magical power, just as the magician produces illusory appearances of physical objects and living beings by his incomprehensible magical power. *Māyā* is thus the material cause (*upādānā kāraṇa*) of the world.

Thibaut thus describes the evolution of the world from *Māyā* and the illusory nature of its manifold objects; "Māyā, under the guidance of the Lord, modifies itself by a progressive evolution into all the individual

existences distinguished by special names and forms, of which the world consists; from it there spring in due succession the different material elements and the whole bodily apparatus belonging to sentient beings. In all these apparently individual forms of existence the one individual Brahman is present, but owing to the particular adjuncts into which *Māyā* has specialised itself, it appears to be broken up, as it were, into a multiplicity of intellectual or sentient principles, the so-called *jīvas* (individual or personal souls). What is real in each *jīva* is only the universal Brahman itself; the whole aggregate of individualising bodily organs and mental functions, which, in our ordinary experience separate and distinguish one *jīva* from another, is the offspring of *Māyā* and as such unreal."¹

Śaṅkara's doctrine is called Vivartavāda as against the doctrine of Parīṇāmavāda. According to Parīṇāmavāda, Brahman is the material cause of the world, while according to Vivartavāda, the world is a superimposition upon Brahman, due to *ajñāna* or ignorance. According to Vivartavāda, Brahman does not undergo any change in creation, as the world-appearance is merely a projection (*adhyāsa*). But according to Parīṇāmavāda, Brahman undergoes real change.²

Māyā is not real, because Brahman is the only thing real; it is not unreal, because it produces the world appearance. It is both real (*sat*) and unreal (*asat*). It is indeterminate or indescribable (*anirvacanīya*). It is beginningless (*anādi*) but not endless (*ananta*), since it is cancelled in deliverance or *Mukti*.

As regards the problem of relation between Brahman and the world, it is supposed that it simply does not arise, since Brahman is real and the world, including the individual souls, is unreal.

Śrī Jīva has levelled a number of charges against Advaitavāda, some of which are as follows:

What, he asks, is the support (*āśraya*) of *ajñāna*, which causes the illusion of the world? The *Jīva* cannot be the support, because it is itself the product of *ajñāna*. There is nothing else that can be its support except Brahman. But, if Brahman is the support, what happens to its purity and its essential nature as *jñāna* (*Jñānasvarūpa*)?³

In an illusory experience, the illusion is due to projection or superimposition. Superimposition involves separate existence of the object superimposed, its past experience, the present revival in the mind of the image of the past experience, and the consciousness of identity between the image and the object now actually experienced. The world-illusion, therefore, presupposes, besides the existence of Brahman, the actual

¹Thibaut, *Vedānta-sūtras with Śaṅkara's Commentary*, p. XXV.

²According to the Sakti-parīṇāmavāda of Śrī Caitanya Brahman does not undergo any change although it is the material cause of the world.

³SS, p. 137.

existence of a world, whose image is projected on it.¹

It may be argued that the actual existence of a world and its past experience is not necessary for projection, because each successive illusion of the world may be due to a previous illusion. This is illogical. The cause which produces an effect cannot itself be caused by the same effect. The position does not improve even if this chain of one illusion causing another is regarded as timeless,² which is clear from Śaṅkara's own reasoning in another connection.³

In fact, no illusion of any kind is possible in Brahman. It is clear from the example of illusion of silver in a conch, that the illusion is due to the quality of whiteness in the conch, which is similar to the quality of whiteness in silver. Therefore, in the case of the world-illusion, or any other illusion projected on Brahman, it is necessary that there should be some quality in Brahman which bears similarity to the quality of the illusory image projected on it. But Brahman is *nirguṇa* and does not possess any quality.⁴

The Advaitins compare the world-illusion to a dream. The dream objects appear to be real in sleep, but on waking they disappear. Similarly, the world appears to be real under the spell of *Māyā* or *ajñāna* and disappears as *ajñāna* is removed on the attainment of Mokṣa. Śrī Jīva turns this argument against the Advaitins themselves by saying that, according to the Śāstras⁵ the dream objects are real, since they are also created by *Īśvara*, who endows the Jīva in his dream state with another body similar to the physical body, and creates objects needed for his enjoyment or suffering according to the good or bad deeds performed by him. If the objects of daily life are like the objects of the dream-world, they must also be real like them.⁶

Śrī Jīva has not repeated most of the arguments commonly used by Rāmānujācārya and others against the Advaitins. The purpose of those arguments is to show in different ways how the theory of *Māyā* is inconsistent with the belief in Brahman, who is self-luminous (*svayam-prakāśa*), without any second (*advaita*), and without any attributes (*nirguṇa*). The Advaitins are, therefore, compelled, in their own interest, ultimately to deny the existence of *Māyā*. They say that actually there is no *Māyā*, and no world-appearance; *Māyā* exists only as long as there is ignorance. The questions: 'What is the cause of *Māyā*? and 'How can *Māyā* conceal Brahman?' are easily set aside by saying that they simply do not arise, because, in the last analysis, *Māyā* does not exist.

¹SS, p. 137.

²ibid, pp. 137-38.

³See Śaṅkara-bhāṣya on *Brahma-sūtra*, 1, 1, 4.

⁴SS, pp. 137-38.

⁵See *Brahma-Sūtra*, 3, 2, 1-2.

⁶SS, 138-41.

But if *Māyā* is regarded as non-existent, the logical implication is that the world is real. A.E. Taylor has, therefore, aptly described Śaṅkara's philosophy as 'illusion of illusion.'

To avoid the logical implications of both the positions, the Advaitins hold that *Māyā* is both real and unreal; real from the exoteric point of view and unreal from the esoteric point of view. But is not the exoteric point of view itself unreal? What then is the meaning of *Māyā* being real from the exoteric point of view?

The distinction between the esoteric and exoteric points of view is, for the Advaitins, the magical key for the solution of all their problems. If a problem arises in relation to the world, they say it does not exist from the point of view of Brahman, or the esoteric point of view; if there is a problem in relation to Brahman, they say it is due to the worldly or exoteric point of view. If, for example, the question is, 'Why does *jīva* who is identical with Brahman, suffer pain?', the answer is 'Pain is due to bondage and bondage is due to *ajñāna*. There is no bondage and no pain from the point of view of Brahman.' If the question is, 'How can there be *ajñāna* when self-luminous Brahman is the only reality?', the answer is, truly speaking, there is no *ajñāna*. *Ajñāna* is only from the worldly point of view and for the *jīva* in bondage.' This is actually no solution of the problem, but running away from it. To tell the *jīva*, suffering pain and death, hunger and disease, that he is actually not in bondage and there is actually no suffering *from the point of view of Brahman*, is no solution of the problem *for him*. The Advaitin, obviously, commits the fallacy of shifting the ground.

We have seen that the Advaitin also tries to solve the problem of dualism of Brahman and the world, or Brahman and *Māyā* by saying that the dualism is only apparent and from the exoteric point of view. But the dualism does not thus disappear. It only gives place to a new kind of dualism—the dualism of points of view. Though the Advaitin explains away the world, he is at a loss to explain the existence of two contradictory points of view in one and the same conscious principle. He will, of course, argue that no contradiction is involved, since the seats of the two points of view are different. But the seat is really the same, since *jīva*, who is regarded as the seat of the exoteric point of view, is also Brahman.

When thus cornered, the Advaitin says that there is, truly speaking, only one point of view, and that is the esoteric point of view. From that point of view, there is neither the world nor anything like the worldly point of view. If the Advaitin really means what he says, he should stop at this. Any other assertion by him would be meaningless, for it would involve the exoteric point of view. But he continues to talk of the necessity of the Guru and Upāsana (worship) for the actual realisation of the esoteric point of view, and quotes the Śrutis, in support of what he says, even though he knows that from the esoteric point of view the Guru, the

God of worship, and the Śrutis, are all illusory.

It is, therefore, evident that the Advaitins cannot completely deny the existence of the world. Śaṁkara himself describes *ajnāna* as something positive or *bhāvarūpa*. His commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* also seems to confirm the view that he does not regard the world as completely unreal. Commenting on 'sattvāccāvarasya' Sūtra, he says that if an effect does not already exist in the cause, the cause cannot produce that effect,¹ just as sand cannot produce oil. Since the world is caused by Brahman, it must exist in Brahman as Brahman, before its production; and since Brahman is eternal, the world must exist eternally.² Elsewhere, he says that before its production, the world lies concealed by positive ignorance (*bhāvarūpa tama*), just as water lies concealed in milk.³

If the world must exist in some form, the monism (*advaita*) of the Advaitins cannot be pure or unqualified. It must be qualified by the world, by *Māyā*, or by just a point of view that creates the appearance of the world. Thus qualified, it must involve both identity and difference, which means that it must be some kind of *bhedābheda*. This view is confirmed by Dr. Dasgupta, who thinks that Śaṁkara's commentary on *Brhman-sūtra* is convincingly in favour of some kind of *bhedābheda*.⁴

The concept of *Māyā* as both real and unreal itself seems to lead to *acintya-bhedābheda*. It implies that all the individual existences are both real and unreal, real as existence, unreal as particulars. It follows that the individual existences are atonce different and non-different from Brahman—different as particulars and non-different as existence. Being both real and unreal, they are described as *anirvacanīya* or indescribable. Therefore, the relation of difference in non-difference, which follows from their contradictory nature as real and unreal, must also be *anirvacanīya*.

The *anirvacanīya* of Śaṁkara, however, is not truly *anirvacanīya*. If it were so, *Māyā* would not be described as both real and unreal, and as beginningless but not endless. Śaṁkara knows it for certain that *Māyā* is both real and unreal, and describes it as such, but he cannot hold the two concepts together in thought. Therefore, *Māyā* is not *anirvacanīya* but *acintya* and the relation of *bhedābheda* between Brahman and the world, which follows from the nature of *Māyā* as both real and unreal, is also *acintya* and not *anirvacanīya*.

Śaṁkara's description of the transcendental reality also seems to imply the concept of *acintya-bhedābheda*. It is said to be a unity, which is neither identity nor difference, nor identity-in-difference. It is an inconceivable

¹'yacca yadātmana yatra na vartate, na tat tata utpadyate.'—Śaṁkara-bhāṣya on Br. S., 2, 1, 16.

²yathā ca kāraṇaṁ brahman tṛṣu kālēṣu sattvaṁ na vyabhicarati, evaṁ kāryamapi jagat tṛṣu kālēṣu sattvaṁ na vyabhicarati. ibid.

³Vedāntakesarī, 25.

⁴Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, II, p. 42.

unity (*acintya-abheda*). What is important in this description is not the unity but its inconceivability. Once it is granted that the nature of transcendental reality is inconceivable, it does not seem to make much difference whether we call it inconceivable unity, or inconceivable difference, or inconceivable identity-in-difference. Both inconceivable identity and inconceivable difference should mean inconceivable identity-in-difference. For neither is identity inconceivable without difference, nor is difference inconceivable without identity. That by *acintya-abheda* Śaṅkara actually means *acintya-bhedābheda* or inconceivable identity-in-difference is clear from some of his own statements. Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmin in his *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* quotes Śaṅkara to explain the relation between the individual who has attained transcendental consciousness and the transcendental reality as that between a wave and the sea, in which the latter predominates.¹ In his commentary on *Śrī Nṛsinha-pūrvatāpanīya-ūpaniṣad*, Śaṅkara says, 'Even the liberated taking form worship God,'² which clearly implies that on the attainment of transcendental consciousness the identity of the Jīva is not completely merged; there is still a trace of difference left.

Also, from the epistemological point of view, the relation of *acintya-bhedābheda* between *jīva* and Brahman, which follows from Śaṅkara's characterisation of *Māyā* as both real and unreal, bears a strong resemblance to the doctrine of *acintya-bhedābheda* in the philosophy of Śrī Caitanya. Dr. M. Sircar, commenting on Śaṅkara's conception of *Māyā*, says, 'Though logically such nebulous character of *Māyā* cannot be denied still Vedantism here follows the affirmation of psychological experience and accepts such a category because its affirmation and denial are facts of psychological experience. Psychological revelations have in Śaṅkara's Vedāntism greater weight than logical determination. In fact, the logic of Vedāntism has followed the lead of psychic experience.' The concept of *acintya-bhedābheda* in the philosophy of Śrī Caitanya is similarly based on experience, which eludes categorical determination. The Śakti is seen to be both different and non-different from its possessor and the relation of *bhedābheda* between the two is accepted as an instance of *arthāpatti*, though it is beyond logical understanding.

Acintya-bhedābheda and Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja

Rāmānuja recognises three categories: *cit*, *acit*, and *Īśvara*. These are real and distinct from each other, yet together they form a unity. The 'unity' of Rāmānuja is, thus, not blank, but qualified. Although *cit*, *acit*, and *Īśvara* are equally real, ultimately, *Īśvara* alone is independent,

¹ *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, II, 2, 196.

² *muktāśca līlayā vīgrahin paṇigrahyamantitvamuvācah*, *Śrī Nṛsinha-pūrvatāpanīya-ūpaniṣad*, 2, 4, 6.

while *cit*, and *acit*, are dependent upon him. They are the body and modes, or attributes of *Īśvara*. Though essentially different in themselves, they cannot, as modes and attributes of *Īśvara*, exist by themselves. Just as the body is controlled, supported and utilised by the soul for its own end, matter and the souls are governed and sustained by *Īśvara*, and used by Him for the realisation of his ends.¹

Rāmānuja's conception of the Absolute has been described as 'an organic unity in which, as in a living organism, one element predominates over and controls the rest. The subordinate elements are termed *viśeṣaṇas* and the predominant one *viśeṣya*.' 'Because the *viśeṣaṇas* cannot by hypothesis exist by themselves separately, the complex whole (*viśiṣṭa*) in which they are included is described as unity. Hence, the name '*Viśiṣṭādvaita*.'² The quality is not the same as substance, but, at the same time, it cannot exist outside the complex whole which it forms with the substance. The blueness of lotus is distinct from the lotus, yet it necessarily forms a part of the complex whole which the lotus is. For this reason, *Īśvara* is sometimes regarded by Rāmānuja as the absolute reality having two integral parts—matter and the souls. He is free from external distinction (*sajātīya* and *vijātīya bheda*), but not free from internal distinction (*svagata bheda*).

To explain this, Rāmānuja formulates a special kind of relation, which he calls *apṛthak-siddhi*, or inseparability. This relation subsists between substance and attribute and may also be found between two substances. *Apṛthak-siddhi* is an internal relation. As such, it differs from the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* relation of *samavāya*, which is an external relation. It is a relation between members which are quite distinct and real, and in this respect it differs from the *Vedānta* view, in which all distinctions are unreal. It is not a bare identity which excludes all differences, but an identity which includes differences; it is the differences which lead to the affirmation of the identity. It should be noted carefully that Rāmānuja does not admit any kind of identity between the relata which the relation of *apṛthak-siddhi* brings together. The unity which is affirmed implies only the unity of a complex whole.

Rāmānuja accepts the *pariṇāma* doctrine, or *sat-kārya-vāda*. Thus, he speaks of two kinds of Brahman—*kārāṇa-brahman* and *kārya-brahman*. In the former state, pure matter and bodiless souls remain in Brahman in an unmanifested (*avyakta*) form; in the latter state, they become manifest. Creation and dissolution are the appearance and disappearance of the manifested form of pure matter and the souls, which, as modes and attributes, are coeternal with God. In the process of creation and dissolution, God, regarded as *viśeṣya*, does not change. The attributes (*viśeṣaṇa*),

¹vide *Śrībhāṣya*, II, 1, 9.

²Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 399.

alone, change. But since the attributes are a part of the complex whole (*viśiṣṭa*), the whole is said to change.

Rāmānuja's system may be described as concrete monism. His Absolute is not a homogenous mass of abstract being, which denies the world of matter and the finite souls, but a concrete universal, which includes them as elements of its own being. It is not static, but a dynamic and growing reality called Brahman, because it *grows* or bursts forth into the cosmic variety. It is the self-conscious effort of self-realisation through self-revelation. The self-revelation is both transcendent and immanent, transcendent in *nitya-vibhūti* and immanent in *līlā-vibhūti*.

Rāmānuja's doctrine of adjectival predication is criticised by philosophers of the school of Śaṅkara and Mādhva as involving an infinite regress. A predicate must be either different from the subject or identical with it. If it is identical, predication is not possible. If it is different, the difference, if it has any meaning, must be real and absolute in which case also predication is not possible. If another predicate is instituted to bring about a relation that predicate, being different from the original subject and predicate, must again require another predicate to bring about a relation and so on *ad infinitum*.

Another difficulty with Rāmānuja is that although he recognises only one Being, *i.e.* the *viśeṣya*, he admits several entities which are regarded as ultimate. All the entities derive their being from the *viśeṣya*, as the attributes derive their being from the substance. It is not possible to reconcile their existential oneness with the differences between them, which are ultimate. It is also not possible to explain how God Himself remains changeless and free from the imperfection of the attributive elements which undergo change. His anxiety to maintain the oneness of being leads Rāmānuja to accentuate the inwardness of *jīva* and *prakṛti* by making them inhere in God as His attributes, but in so doing he also makes God responsible for their imperfections.

Rāmānuja is fully aware of this difficulty. To avoid the same, it appears, he adopts the analogy of the body and the soul. The analogy accentuates the outwardness of the relation between God and the world. The relation between the body and the soul is not essentially like the relation between the substance and the attributes. The soul remains unaffected by changes in the body and may exist without it. God, in the form of the *Antaryāmin*, regulates the universe, just as the soul regulates the body. But even this analogy does not seem to help very much, for the body is inert and its movements are entirely regulated by the soul. The responsibility for all its actions must, therefore, rest upon the soul. God, as the inward regulator, must be responsible for all the changes in the world and the actions of the Jīvas, who have no freedom of their own. Besides, so long as the soul identifies itself with the body it also suffers from its pains. If the relation between the *Antaryāmin* and the

world be so close, how can the *Antaryāmin* remain unaffected by the sorrows and miseries of the world? Sometimes, therefore, Rāmānuja uses the analogy of the ruler and his subjects, which further accentuates the outwardness of the relation. The ruler frames the laws to be followed by his subjects, but the subjects have the freedom to obey or not to obey. He rewards or punishes them according to their deeds, but is not affected by their joys and sorrows.

From this we may conclude that Rāmānuja finds it difficult to describe the relation, which is essentially indescribable, but he accepts both identity and difference. This is clear from his commentary on *Brahma-sūtras*. In his commentary on *Sūtra*, II, 1, 22, he states that 'Just as the material world, or *acit* can never be absolutely identical with *Paramātman*, the *jīva*, or *cit* can never be absolutely identical with *Paramātman*' while in his commentary on *Sūtra*, II, 1.14. he emphasises that the world cannot be absolutely different from Brahman. Again, in his commentary on *Sūtra*, II, 3. 42. he advocates identity-in-difference, which means identity of one substance existing in two different forms (*prakāryādvaita*).¹ At the same time, however, Rāmānuja criticises the relations of identity, difference, and identity-in-difference as inadequate, and formulates the relation of *apṛthak-siddhi* to represent his special point of view. But this makes confusion worse confounded. For *apṛthak-siddhi* is not strictly a relation,² though it is sometimes spoken of as such.³ As Datta and Chatterjee remark, "This is merely giving up the game of logical understanding. For, inseparability of existence is itself a vague relation admitting of various formulations. Even Śaṅkara's conception of the relation between the effect and the cause (*ananyatva*) can come under this."⁴

It is, therefore, evident that Rāmānuja accepts both difference and non-difference, but he cannot bring the relation under any logical category, which necessarily leads to the doctrine of *Acintya-bhedābheda*.

Acintya-bhedābheda and Svābhāvika-bhedābheda of Nimbārka

Nimbārkācārya recognises three entities, *cit*, *acit*, and *Brahman*, also called *bhoktṛ* (the enjoyer *Jīva*), *bhojya* (enjoyable matter), and *niyantr* (the controller, the Lord).

Acit is of three kinds—*prākṛta*, *aprākṛta*, and *kāla*. *Prākṛta* is the product of *prakṛti*. *Aprākṛta* is defined negatively as that which is not the product of *prakṛti*, but its real nature is not clearly brought out. Puruṣot-tamācārya of the Nimbārka school has, in his *Vedāntaratna-mañjūṣā*, described *acitaprākṛta* as the material cause of the *dhāman* (celestial

¹*ekama eva vastu dvirūpama pratīyate.*

²*Śrībhāṣya*, II, 2. 12.

³cf. *Sarvārtha-siddhi* with *Tattva-muktā-kalāpa*, by Vedānta Desika, p. 590.

⁴*An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 484.

abode) of Brahman and the bodies and ornaments etc. of Brahman and his associates.¹ It does not appear, however, that Nimbārka also regards the body of Brahman as *aprākṛta-acit*. According to Śrī Caitanya, the *dhāman* and body of *Para-brahman* and all other things pertaining to the *dhāman* are *aprākṛta-cit*.

Śrī Nimbārka has called his doctrine *Svābhāvika-bhedābheda* to distinguish it from the *bhedābheda* of Bhāskarācārya and others. Bhāskara's *bhedābheda* is called '*aupādhika-bhedābheda*,' because, according to him, *abheda* is real and eternal, while *bheda* is unreal and accidental. *Bheda* is due to accidental predicates (*upādhis*), like the body and the senses, and disappears on the attainment of *mokṣa*. According to Nimbārka, both *bheda* and *abheda* are equally real, because they characterise the very nature (*svabhāva*) of Brahman.

Thus, the special contribution of Nimbārka to the problem of relation between God and the world is his emphasis on the necessity of reconciling both the points of view of identity and difference. He has reconciled the apparently contradictory statements of the *Śrutis*, which sometimes seem to support identity and sometimes difference. His interpretation of the *Brahma-sūtras* is also, for this reason, more faithful to the *Sūtras* than the interpretations of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhva, and Vallabha. It is free from any effort to distort their real meaning.²

The philosophy of Śrī Caitanya, therefore, bears great resemblance to the doctrine of Nimbārka. Both Śrī Caitanya and Śrī Nimbārka give equal importance to identity and difference; both regard the individual souls and the world as the result of the *Śakti* of Brahman; both regard Brahman as the material cause of the world and the individual souls; both regard Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate reality.

The philosophers of the school of Śrī Caitanya did not term their doctrine of *bhedābheda* as *svābhāvika* (natural or internal) *bhedābheda*, but this does not mean that they did not regard *bhedābheda* as *svābhāvika*. For, if both difference and identity are real, they must necessarily be *svābhāvika*.

Similarly, it may be surmised that, although Nimbārka did not call his doctrine *acintya bhedābheda*, he must have regarded the simultaneous presence of identity and difference as due to the *acintya-śakti* of

¹*The Cultural Heritage of India*, article by Dr. Roma Chowdury on 'The Nimbārka School of Vedānta,' p. 339.

²Dr. V. S. Ghāte, who has made a comparative study of the *bhāṣyas* of the five Acāryas, remarks 'If at all we insist on seeing in the *sūtras* one of the five systems under discussion, it can be at the most the *bhedābheda* system of Nimbārka, according to which both *bheda* and *abheda* are equally real, without the idea of any subordination of one to the other (see in this connection especially *sūtras*, III, 2, 27-29, which fit in with the doctrine of Nimbārka better than with any other—*The Vedānta* by V. S. Ghāte, p. 183.

Brahman. This is plausible, particularly in view of Nimbārka's commentary on *Brahma-sūtras*, *ātmani caivam vicitrāśca*¹ and *srutetsu śabda mūlat-vāt*,² which indicate his belief in the *acintya-śakti* of Brahman. However, there is nothing in the writings of Śrī Nimbārkācārya to lend support to this view.

On the other hand, it is evident that he tries to prove the relation of *bhedābheda* with the help of his doctrine of causation, according to which, cause and effect involve both identity and difference. The cause, though different from the effect, functionally and qualitatively, is identical with it by its nature and essence. The cause is also identical with the effect in the sense that the latter depends wholly upon the former. The cause is both transcendent and immanent in relation to the effect. Nimbārka also, tries to prove the relation of identity-in-difference between Brahman and the world on the analogy of the relation between a whole and its parts.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmin says that the relation of identity-in-difference between Brahman and the world, or between Brahman and *Jīva*, cannot be proved by means of the relation of cause and effect, for the cause and the effect can never be one. The cause does not appear as effect in the state of cause and the effect does not appear as cause in the state of effect. The cause is identical with each effect individually, but not with all the effects collectively. If that were so, the distinction between the different forms of effect of a cause would be obliterated. The earth as cause is identical with each form of earthen pot severally, but if it were identical with all the pot forms collectively, there would be no difference between the different forms of earthen pots. It cannot be said that all the different pots are one as class, and different as particulars, for the same thing cannot have two different forms. To remove this difficulty, a third 'thing' will have to be postulated, to unite the two forms, and this will lead to infinite regress.³

The relation between part and whole also does not adequately describe the relation between Brahman and the world, for, in the case of Brahman, the identity between part and whole is not of the same type as the identity between part and whole of an ordinary object. In the case of an ordinary object, though the part is identical with the whole, in the sense that it has no existence apart from the whole, it actually is not the whole. But, in the case of Brahman, the part actually is the whole and has the same qualities and powers as the whole. This is a peculiar kind of relation, which eludes logical understanding. It is *bhedābheda* of a different kind. It is *acintya-bhedābheda*.

An important charge that Śrī Jīva brings against *Svābhāvika-bhedābheda* is that Brahman is by nature pure and perfect. But, if there is *svābhāvika*

¹VPS, 2. 1. 28.

²ibid, 2. 1. 27.

³SS, pp. 148-49.

abheda between Brahman and *Jīva*, the impurities and imperfections of the latter must also belong to the former. Similarly, the qualities of omniscience and omnipotence, found in Brahman, must be shared by the *Jīvas*, who are by nature limited in their knowledge and power. If the relation of identity between Brahman and *Jīva* is such that Brahman is not in the least affected by the impurities and imperfections of the *jīvas*, it means that the relation is not only *svābhāvika*, but *acintya*. This is the reason why Śrī Caitanya has called his doctrine *acintya-bhedābheda* rather than simply *bhedābheda* or *svābhāvika-bhedābheda*.

It may be urged that the concept of *acintya* is so inextricably connected with the doctrine of *bhedābheda* that the acceptance of the latter necessarily implies the acceptance of the former. Therefore, Nimbāraka could not have accepted *bhedābheda* without, at the same time, recognising its essential nature as *acintya*, even though he tried to make it acceptable to the logical mind by means of reasoning, as far as that was possible. But, even then, *acintya-bhedābheda* would differ from *svābhāvika-bhedābheda* in two important respects: Nimbārka-cārya can, at the most, be said to have recognised *acintya-bhedābheda* (by implication) in the case of Brahman and his *śaktis*, or parts. But, Śrī Caitanya and his followers have adopted *acintya-bhedābheda* as an universal principle, applicable to *śakti* and its possessor everywhere, and have tried to establish it as such by reasoning. Further, in the case of Brahman, they have developed the idea of Divine Śakti, in its three aspects, as *Antaraṅgā*, *Bahiraṅgā*, and *Taṭasthā*, and have so accentuated difference, in the case of *Bahiraṅgā* and *Taṭasthā Śaktis*, that any transformation of them leaves Brahman entirely unaffected.

Acintya-bhedābheda and Bhedavāda of Mādhva

Mādhvācārya insists on five absolute and eternal distinctions between *Brahman*, *Jīva* and *Jada*, or the inanimate world: the distinction between *Brahman* and *Jīva*, between *Brahman* and the inanimate world, between one *Jīva* and another, between *Jīva* and the inanimate world, and between one inanimate object and another.

Brahman is Viṣṇu, who creates the world from *Prakṛti*, which is absolutely and eternally distinct from him. He is the efficient cause, but not the material cause, of the world. The *Jīvas* are the reflected counterparts (*pratibimbāṁśa*) of Viṣṇu. The bodies of the *Jīvas*, eternally present in *Vaikunṭha*, the celestial abode of Viṣṇu, are transcendental (*aprākṛta*). Hence, they are called unconditioned-reflected-counterparts (*nirupādhika-pratibimbāṁśa*) of Viṣṇu. The bodies of the *Jīvas* of the material world are material; therefore, they are called conditioned-reflected-counterparts (*sopādhika-pratibimbāṁśa*) of Viṣṇu.

The fivefold distinction between Brahman, *Jīva* and the inanimate world is not a mere appearance (*māyāmātra*): it is real and beginningless.

The world and the *Jīvas*, however, are wholly dependent on Brahman, who is their immanent ruler and regulator.

A special feature of Mādhva's philosophy is the category of *viśeṣa*, which he introduces to explain the appearance of *bheda*, where there is none. The category distinguishes a quality from a substance and apart from the whole. Between a substance and its quality or between a whole and its parts there is no difference. The difference appears on account of *viśeṣa*. We do not perceive any difference between the cloth and its whiteness, but we do perceive the *viśeṣa* (particularity) of the cloth. If there were difference between the cloth and its whiteness, then there would be difference between the difference and the cloth, and between the difference and the whiteness, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹ Unlike the *viśeṣa* of the *Nyāya-vaiśeṣika*, which characterises the eternal individual substances only, the *viśeṣa* of Mādhva characterises eternal as well as non-eternal substances. In the case of God, the principle of *viśeṣa* is employed to reconcile his unity with the plurality of his qualities and powers, and the plurality of His divine body, divine dress, divine abode, and the like.

The concept of *viśeṣa*, seems to be akin to the concept of *acintya-bhedābheda*. For Mādhvācārya hints that the identity-in-difference between the whole and the part, the substance and the attribute, the *śakti* and *śaktimān*, the agent and the action, in the case of Brahman as well as *Jīva* and *prakṛti*, is due to the *acintya-śakti* of Brahman.² *Viśeṣa*, thus, seems to be only another name for the *acintyā-śakti* of Brahman, which underlies the doctrine of *acintya-bhedābheda*. Dāsguptā, in fact, traces the supra-logical concept of *acintya* in the philosophy of Caitanya to the concept of *viśeṣa* in the philosophy of Mādhvācārya. He says, 'The idea of introducing a concept of the supra-logical in order to reconcile the different scriptural texts, which describe reality as characterless (*nirviśeṣa*), qualified (*viśiṣṭa*), and many, can be traced to the introduction of the concept of *viśeṣa* in the philosophy of Mādhva, by which Mādhva tried to reconcile the concept of monism with that of plurality.'³ The view gains further support from the fact that Baladeva, the last of the important thinkers of the school of Śrī Caitanya, reverts to Mādhva's doctrine of *viśeṣa* in reconciling monism and pluralism, and characterises the concept of *viśeṣa* as being identical with the concept of *acintya*. He says that Brahman is spoken of as possessing the qualities of *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*, although these qualities constitute the essence of Brahman. This is due to the supra-logical functions of *viśeṣa* (*acintya-viśeṣa-mahimā*), because *viśeṣa* does not imply that Brahman is, from one point of view, identical with its qualities, and from another point of view different.⁴

¹*Tattvapradīpa*, edited by B. N. Krishnamūrti Sharmā, p. 11.

²*Madhva-bhāṣya* on *Bhāgavata*, *Śloka*, 11. 7. 51.

³*A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. IV, p. 18.

⁴*Siddhānta-ratnā*, Banaras, 1924, pp. 17-22.

We may, however, state that even though Mādhvācārya has used *viśeṣa* in the sense of *acintya-śakti* of Brahman, the *acintya* of Mādhvācārya is not the same as the *acintya* of the school of Śrī Caitanya. Mādhvācārya has used the concept of *acintya* to explain the relation of *bhedābheda* between part and whole, substance and attribute, and *śakti* and its possessor, in the case of Brahman, *Jīva* or *prakṛti*, but not between Brahman and *Jīva* or *prakṛti*.¹ The relation of *acintya-bhedābheda*, according to Śrī Caitanya, is a relation that obtains universally between *śakti* and its possessor, and since *Jīva* and *prakṛti* are the manifestations of the *śakti* of Brahman, it obtains between Brahman and *Jīva* or *prakṛti* as well.

Mādhvācārya's concept of *acintya* is not so *acintya*, or inconceivable, as the *acintya* of Śrī Caitanya. Mādhvācārya's *acintya* is related to *viśeṣa*, which reconciles the *appearance* of difference with identity, while Śrī Caitanya's *acintya* reconciles *real* difference with *real* identity.

It will not be proper, in this connection, to attach much importance to the expressions like '*acintya-viśeṣa-mahimā*' used by Baladeva, because he does not represent the true spirit of the philosophy of Śrī Caitanya and, in certain respects, his views are influenced by Mādhvācārya. His view on the doctrine of *acintya bhedābheda*, also, does not seem to be free from this influence. For, like Mādhvācārya, he has also not made any mention of *acintya-bhedābheda* in connection with the problem of relation between God and *Jīva* or the world.

But, even though Mādhvācārya does not show any inclination for the doctrine of *acintya-bhedābheda*, his philosophy appears to lead to it, when pressed to its logical conclusion. His exclusive preference for *bheda*, or pluralism, is in direct contrast with Śaṅkara's exclusive preference for *abheda*, or monism. Just as pluralism, as an essential aspect of the absolute whole of reality, asserts itself time after time in the monistic philosophy of Śaṅkara, monism repeatedly asserts itself in the pluralistic philosophy of Mādhvācārya.

There is an aspect of identity in each of the five distinctions held by Mādhvācārya as absolute. God and the individual soul are identical, since both are conscious and related to each other as a whole is to its parts. God and the inanimate world are identical in as much as the latter is wholly dependent for its creation and maintenance on the former; one individual soul is identical with another, in as much as both are conscious in nature, both are parts of God, and both are dependent upon Him; the individual soul and the inanimate world are identical, in as much as both have a relative existence and are dependent on God; one inanimate object is identical with another, in as much as both are inanimate and wholly dependent upon God, who binds them together in a systematic whole.

¹*Madhva-bhāṣya*, 2, 3, 28-9.

Having recognised the distinction between God, *Jīva* and the world, as absolute, Mādhvācārya cannot regard God as the immanent regulator of the Jivas and the world, nor the Jivas and the world as wholly dependent upon Him. It is only the *acintya-śakti* of God which can make this kind of dependence or immanent regulation, implying identity-in-difference, possible.

Mādhvācārya makes the category of Viśeṣa applicable to the whole and its parts in the case of God, *Jīva*, and the world. But he makes it inapplicable to God in relation to *Jīva*, although he recognises the latter as part of God. Obviously, this is due to his insistence on absolute difference between God and *Jīva*. But, if the difference is absolute, he should not regard the *Jīva* as part of God, which he does, probably to safeguard the infinitude and omnipresence of God. To hide the inconsistency involved in this, he introduces the concept of *pratibimbāṁśa*. The *pratibimbāṁśa*, or the reflected-counter-part of an object, is supposed to be different from the object as *pratibimba*, and identical as *āṁśa*.

Pratibimbāṁśa, however, is not a logical concept, for the part of the *pratibimba* (or the *pratibimba* of a part) of an object cannot be a part of the object itself. In case it is insisted that *pratibimbāṁśa* of an object means a reflected counterpart of the object, which is both different and non-different from it, *pratibimbāṁśa* must be a supra-logical concept, similar to the concept of *acintya-bhedābheda*.

The role of the concept of *pratibimbāṁśa* in the philosophy of Mādhvācārya is very much the same as that of the concept of *aprthak-siddhi* in the philosophy of Rāmānuja. Both the Ācāryas propound their respective doctrines, but when forced by logic to adopt a position similar to *acintya-bhedābheda*, they use these concepts to conceal their helplessness.

Acintya-bhedābheda and Śuddhādvaita of Vallabhācārya

According to Śrī Vallabhācārya's doctrine of *śuddhādvaita*, Brahman is a pure unity, free from *Māyā*. It is also free from the three kinds of difference known as *svajātīya-bheda*, *vijātīya-bheda* and *svagata-bheda*. It is omniscient and omnipotent and possesses an infinite number of attributes. It has marvellous powers (*aiśvarya*) by virtue of which it can even hold together things or attributes which are mutually opposed.¹ Thus, it is both qualified (*saguṇa*) and unqualified (*nirguṇa*).² It is essentially of the nature of *sat* (existence), *cit* (intelligence) and *ānanda* (bliss).

Jīva and the world are identical with Brahman. *Jīva* is Brahman with the quality of bliss obscured and the physical world is Brahman with the qualities of bliss and intelligence obscured. Creation and destruction in their case mean the appearance (*āvirbhāva*) and disappearance (*tirobhāva*) of Brahman in these forms. Brahman is both the material and the efficient

¹*Anubhāṣya*, 1, 1, 4.

²*ibid*, III, 2, 27.

cause of *Jīva* and the world, manifesting itself in these forms simply for the purpose of sport (*līlā*). In doing so, it does not undergo any change in essence. It is just like snake forming itself into coils.¹

Jīva is an atomic part of Brahman, produced from its *cit* (intelligence) part, just as sparks are produced from fire. It is not an adjective of Brahman but Brahman under a limit.² That thou art implies pure identity between Brahman and *Jīva*.

There are three categories of *Jīvas*: *śuddha* (pure), *samsārin*, and *mukta*. *Jīva* is *śuddha* when its divine qualities, such as *aiśvaryā*, are not obscured by *avidyā* (ignorance); *samsārin* when, by the will of Brahman, its divine qualities are obscured and it comes in contact with *avidyā*, indentifying itself with the gross and subtle bodies; and *mukta* when, again by the will of Brahman, it is freed from bondage by *vidyā*.

The inanimate world (*jaḍa*) is created from the *sat* (existence) part of Brahman. It is, therefore, as real as Brahman. But the *Jīva*, under the influence of *avidyā*, endows it with illusory forms. The world is real, but its appearance (*pratīti*) to the *Jīva* under the spell of *avidyā*, is erroneous. It is like a man sitting on a moving boat perceiving a tree on the bank, to whom the tree appears to be in motion. The tree is real, but the perception of the motion of the tree is illusory. Similarly, the world, which is essentially of the nature of Brahman and, therefore, purely subjective and free from difference, is real, but the objectivity and multiplicity, which the *Jīva* in ignorance perceives in it, are unreal.

As already explained, the manifestation of Brahman as many does not involve any change. Brahman pervades the world in its fulness as existence, knowledge and bliss, but it manifests its three characters in different proportions in different objects of the world. For this reason, Vallabha regards Brahman as the *samavāyī kāraṇa* of the world, and uses the term *samavāya* in a sense different from that in which it is used by the Naiyāyikas. According to the Naiyāyikas, *samavāya* is the relation of inherence which exists between pairs like cause and effect, and substance and quality. But, according to Vallabha, it means identity (*tādātmya*), since, according to him, the substance itself appears in qualities and in cause and effect; there is no separate relation of inherence to combine these pairs. Between Brahman, *Jīva*, and *Jaḍa*, the relation is that of pure identity.

Both Śaṅkarācārya and Vallabha are *advaitins*, but while Śaṅkara's *advaita* implies complete denial of the world, Vallabha's *advaita* implies complete identification of Brahman with the world. By thus completely identifying Brahman with the world, however, Vallabha creates a number of difficulties, for, in this way, it is possible neither to maintain the purity of Brahman nor the independence of *Jīva*.

¹ *Anubhāṣya*, III, 2, 27.

² *ibid*, II, 3, 29.

Jīva, being identical with Brahman, is endowed with all the divine powers (*aiśvarya*). It is bound by *avidyā* when, by the will of Brahman, its divine powers are obscured. It is not possible to understand how all the divine powers, including *Jñāna*, can be obscured. For *Jīva* is produced from the *cit* part of Brahman and *Jñāna* is the very essence of it. If *Jñāna* is obscured, the *Jīva* must cease to exist.

Since, according to Vallabha, the *Jīva*'s association with *avidyā*, as well as his bondage and freedom, are brought about by the free will of Brahman for the purpose of sport, Brahman must be responsible for all the good and bad deeds of *Jīva*. This not only deprives *Jīva* of its freedom, but makes Brahman the *bhoktā* (enjoyer) of the fruits of its actions, which is contrary both to the nature of Brahman and the teachings of the *Śāstras*.

Vallabha identifies the world with the *sat-amśa* (existence part) of Brahman. He is, therefore, compelled to regard the *sataṁśa* of Brahman as *Jada*¹ (material), which is against the nature of Brahman as *sat-cit-ānanda*. *Sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* are, in fact, not three different things in Brahman. *Sat* actually means the *sattā*, or existence of *cit* and *ānanda*.

Vallabha holds that the manifestation of Brahman as many does not involve any change in the nature of Brahman, just as the conversion of gold into ornaments does not involve any change in the nature of gold. But the conversion of gold into ornaments does mean a change in form. Similarly, the manifestation of Brahman as many involves a change, in as much as it means the taking over by Brahman of new forms and it is difficult to see how it can escape the imperfections of these.

Although Vallabha affirms the relation of pure identity between Brahman, *Jīva* and the world, he says that identity is like the identity between part and whole. The relation between part and whole clearly implies identity-in-difference, for the part, though identical with the whole, is not the whole, and one part is different from another.

The relation of *samavāya*, even in the sense in which Vallabha uses it, also implies difference, for how can there be any relation at all without the different terms to be related? Vallabha himself admits difference in Brahman, for the sake of sport. But he is unable to explain how identity and difference are themselves related. The special sense in which the term *samavāya* is used accentuates identity but does not obliterate difference and seems to emphasise the concept of *acintya*, by somehow holding together identity and difference. To say that Brahman, by his own will, manifests himself as many, and to hold, at the same time, that multiplication does not cause any change in Brahman, without explaining how this is possible, amounts to the acceptance of a position similar to the doctrine of *acintya-bhedā-bheda*. Indeed, Vallabhācārya seems to come very near it when he says, at

¹ *Anubhāṣya*, II, 3, 43.

one place, that creation is possible on account of the unfathomable greatness and the incomprehensible powers (*aiśvarya*) of Brahman, which can hold together all sorts of opposites.¹ But his commitment to the principle of pure unity of Brahman prevents him from openly adopting it as the basic principle of his philosophy.

¹ *Anubhāṣya*, 2, 1, 26-31.