

वृत्तपत्राचे नांव :- दि. टाईम्स ऑफ इंडिया  
वृत्तपत्र प्रकाशन ठिकाण :- मुंबई  
वृत्तपत्र पान नं :- 10  
दिनांक :- 21/02/2002  
कटींग नं :-

## Madhva Siddhanta: Bhakti and Gnana

By C A P VITTAL

SRI Madhvacharya, the 13th century *dvaita* philosopher, is believed to have his divine origin from Mukhyaprana or Vayu, who had in earlier yugas been born as Hanuman, the attendant of Lord Rama and Bhimasena, celebrated in the *Mahabharata* as the mightiest man, the destroyer of asuras born as kings.

Sri Madhva was a dualist who believed in the verity of God, jeeva and matter existing eternally as distinct entities. His philosophy is a realistic and theistic philosophy. He advocated an active life emphasising duty, devotion and dedication. He conceives of Vishnu as Brahman of Vedanta. Vishnu is the Independent Supreme Reality and souls and matter are dependent realities. This doctrine of Vishnu as the highest principle finds elucidation in almost all the works of Sri Madhva. According to him, Vishnu possesses infinite auspicious qualities; flawless and totally independent. All others are dependent upon Him.

The *Uttara Meemamsa* sums up the cardinal tenets of Sri Madhvacharya's philosophy: "In Sri Madhva's theology Hari (Vishnu) is Supreme, and the world is real.

Separateness or difference (Bheda) is true; the individual souls are infinitely graded as superior and inferior and are dependent upon God (Vishnu); liberation is self-realisation, consisting in the enjoyment of such bliss as remained latent in the soul; pure Bhakti (devotion) is the means to this end. Perception, inference and testimony, are the source of knowledge (measures of proof), mundane and heavenly".

*Pancha-Bheda*, the five distinctions, according to Sri Madhva, are in existence from eternity and are real. The difference exists between: God and individual souls, God and jada (lifeless objects), souls amongst themselves, souls and jada and jada amongst themselves. The doctrine of these five distinctions forms the basis of Sri Madhva's philosophy; its knowledge is the precondition for the attainment of super salvation.

Sri Madhva in *Sri Vishnu Tattva Nirnaya* has defined 'difference' or bheda as the very nature of the object. The difference which is of essence herein relates to the fundamental distinction of God and souls. Perception, inference, scriptures and experience are some of the cannons used by Sri Madhva to postulate the bheda or difference

theory, and in consonance with shruti, exclaims "*Satyam Bheda, Satyam Bhida*" — difference is real, difference is real.

Sri Madhva defines philosophy as the determination of things as they are in themselves, *Tatva Nirnaya*. Experience or *anubhava* plays a vital role in the process. Experience is the most secure foundation for philosophical speculation. Philosophy not based on experience is barren and experience not inferred by philosophical enquiry is blind and has no significance. Experience possesses the hallmark of personal conviction. Pure experience, shorn of the interpretation due to the active perceiving mind and the ever-present tendency to infer cannot be self-contradictory. Every aspect of experience has been shown to have its proper place in the evaluation of experience.

Mukti is the highest purushartha (desirable objective) of the soul. Souls are broadly categorised into *Satvika*, *Rajasa* and *Tamasa*. The first category alone qualifies to attain mukti. The real nature of the soul is his existence in his pure state of consciousness and bliss. This is not realised by him in samsara when

he is enveloped by avidhya, sorrow and fear. Avidhya, kama and karma are his empirical

bondage. Once these extraneous associations are got rid of through sadhana, the soul unfolds its true nature of bliss and consciousness. The whole universe of plurality (which continues to exist) will then be viewed by him in its correct and proper perceptive.

Mukti is attained only through *bhakti* towards the Lord. In Madhva siddhanta, bhakti and gnana go hand in hand. Bhakti is a continuous unending flow of love for the Lord, mingled with a deep knowledge and conviction of the Lord being the abode of endless and defectless auspicious attributes. Sublime love towards the Almighty is capable of invoking His grace, which ultimately leads to liberation of the soul.

In *dvaita*, the relationship between the Lord and the soul is that of a benevolent master and a willing and devoted servant. The soul, jeeva, becomes dependent on *tatva*. The Lord is responsible for his being, knowing and action. He is the efficient cause of the universe, the material cause being the beginningless prakriti. The Lord is the architect of the universe, its hope and its salvation.

(Today is Madhva Navami)



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