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THE DIVINE DEVOTEE HIERARCHY IN THE THEOLOGY OF RĀMNUJA: WHERE THE MASTER BECOMES THE SERVANT

by

Sherry L. Morton

Under the Direction of Kathryn McClymond

Abstract

In *The Theology of Rāmānuja,* John Braisted Carman carefully examines the south Asian philosopher Rāmānuja's concepts of the Supreme Person, and the relational dynamics between the Supreme Person and the devotee. Carman sees in Rāmānuja's discussion of the master (*śeṣi*)/servant (*śeṣa*) relationship the most important understandings concerning the hierarchy between the Supreme Person and the devotee. Carmen argues that in this devotional relationship there is a point at which the distinction between the master and the servant is dissolved, and mutual dependence is revealed. This paper focuses on the point where the roles in the relationship between the divine and the devotee are reversed. In this reversal the master takes on the role of the servant and the servant the master. It is argued here that this role reversal is the action that illuminates the ultimate dissolution of the hierarchy that Rāmānuja recognizes and results in spiritual empowerment for the devotee.

INDEX WORDS: Advaita Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita, Bhakti, John Braisted Carman, Gita Govinda, Ramanuja, Shrivaishnava, Vishitadvaita Vedanta

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Sherry L. Morton

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Georgia State University

2005

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Namaste to you all.

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The Divine Devotee Hierarchy in the Theology of Rāmānuja: Where the Master Becomes the Servant

Introduction

Vedānta, with its rich textual tradition filled with paradox, is the dominant philosophy of Hinduism. The great South Asian philosopher/theologian Rāmānuja (1017-1137 CE) was particularly gifted in his ability to synthesize the teachings of the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy (Vedānta) with those of the devotional system of Śrīvaiṣṇava (the tradition of the Āḻvār-s). He particularly focused on reconciling the various concepts of the Supreme Person/Brahman/Ultimate Reality. There are schools of thought in Vedānta that assert that the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*) is a being of abstract unity that is beyond any material substance. Other schools assert He is a tangible Personal Lord and still others assert that He is both. Śrīvaiṣṇava teaches that the Supreme Person is a tangible Personal Lord and that union with Him is to be achieved via intense devotion. Each system has liberation as its goal but the paths to achieving liberation are varied and their understanding of the exact workings of the relationship between the devotee and the Supreme Person equally diverse. Rāmānuja's primary challenge was to reconcile the view of the Supreme Person who is both abstract, without qualities (*nirguṇa*), and with the view of the Personal Lord with material qualities (*saguṇa*). This dichotomy is only one of the many that Rāmānuja had to reconcile in order to bring the orthodox

Vedānta schools and those of the devotional tradition of the ĀḶvār-s into a single coherent system. Until Rāmānuja schools of philosophy settled on one or the other of these classifications as the ultimate nature of the Supreme Person. The Advaita philosophy of non-dualism, taught by Śaṇkara (788-820 CE), argued that the Supreme Person was abstract without material qualities (*nirguṇa*). The goal for finite beings was to be absorbed in this unity via intense study and meditation. For these non-dualists the idea of devotion to a Personal Lord was a lower and lesser understanding than their understanding of absorption in the abstract Supreme Person. On the other side of the debate were the dualistic and pluralistic philosophies of teachers such as Madhva, Nimbārka and the ĀḶvār-s. They stressed the material qualities of the Supreme Person, conceiving Him to be a Personal Lord. Unlike the non-dualists who focused on reality as transcendent, the dualists understood reality as a system of pairs of opposites. The goal for the devotee in the dualistic systems is communion with the Supreme Person through devotion, who is distinct from finite beings, but with whom union is ultimately possible.

Rāmānuja's philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) accepts the truth stated in the Veda-s that the Supreme Person is transcendent, an abstract unity, and the substance that underlies all material reality. To synthesize this basic belief with the concept of an equally authoritative Personal Lord he qualifies his belief. The qualification is as follows: if the Supreme Person is the substance of all material reality, then it is logically consistent for Him to take

material form and function as a Personal Lord. This view becomes known as qualified non-dualism, and it allows the devotee to achieve complete union with the Supreme Person directly through contemplation or as the result of intense devotion (*bhakti*). This argument for the validity of devotion as a path to the ultimate realization of the Supreme Person is one of Rāmānuja's most potent contributions to the theology of South Asia. With this argument Rāmānuja refutes Śaṇkara's claim that the path of devotion to a Personal Lord is an inferior method, when compared to that of contemplation of and absorption in abstract unity, for achieving the highest spiritual realization. He also does not completely support the dualist position, which asserts communion with and devotion to the Supreme Person and rejects the idea of absorption in union. Rāmānuja accomplishes not only the synthesis of textual material but also synthesis of the practices of devotionalism, with those orthodox non-dualists.

My argument is erected on a foundation laid by John Carman, former director of the Center for the Study of World Religions and professor of comparative religion at Harvard Divinity School. Carman's doctoral dissertation, published in book form as *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (1974), remains the definitive work on the nature of divine supremacy and accessibility in the theology of Rāmānuja. Much of Carman's work was built on translations of Sanskrit texts by J. A. B. van Buitenen, former Distinguished Service Professor of Sanskrit and Indic Studies at the University of Chicago and George Thibaut, a late nineteenth-century indologist.

In *The Theology of Rāmānuja,* Carman carefully examines Rāmānuja's concepts of the Supreme Person and the relational dynamics between the Supreme Person and the devotee. Carman sees in Rāmānuja's discussion of the master(*śeṣi*)/servant (*śeṣa*) relationship the most important understandings concerning the hierarchy between the Supreme Person and the devotee. In subsequent writings based on Rāmānuja's commentary (*bhāṣya)* on the *Bhagavad Gītā,* Carman argues that the relationship between the Supreme Person and the devotee ultimately becomes one of mutual dependence. That the devotee is dependent on the Divine is logical and in no way controversial. However, mutual dependence places the Divine in the position of being dependent on the devotee. For mutual dependence to occur there must still be some distinction between the Divine and the Devotee or the relationship would be the union of Śaṇkara. I argue that it is the reversal of hierarchy, not its simple elimination that allows for the distinction necessary to create mutual dependence. The idea of reversal of hierarchy sounded no less shocking in the Middle Ages than it does today. Carman argues that in Rāmānuja's devotional relationship there is a point at which the distinction between the master and the servant is dissolved, and mutual dependence is revealed. Rāmānuja argues, the Supreme Person is the transcendent substance of all reality, and that there is no reason He cannot take a material form and function as a Personal Lord. For Rāmānuja the ultimate end, for either devotion to the Personal Lord or meditation on the abstract unity, is union of the Supreme Person and the

devotee. Therefore, it is again logical that for union to be achieved the distinction between the two would be dissolved.

I agree with Carman that following the path of union with the Supreme Person as Rāmānuja does leads to an ultimate breakdown of the distinction necessary to support hierarchy. I also agree that without such hierarchy the dynamic becomes one of mutual dependence. This mutual dependence appears at first to be a paradox that is a logical inconsistency, which cannot be resolved. I argue that mutual dependence is the bridge that allows Rāmānuja's theology to achieve its ultimate goal of validation of all Vedāntic teachings, and to reconcile them with the devotional practice of Śrīvaiṣṇava, without simply asserting the ultimate authority of non-dualism. Rāmānuja takes his theology to the point that logic would demand that he continue on and assert that the Supreme Person is dependent on his dependents but he stops before making this assertion. His later followers do continue this logic to that end. I argue that before the point where hierarchy is completely dissolved, the relationship between the divine and the devotee becomes fluid and circular. In this circular dynamic the master takes on the role of the servant and the servant the master. This role reversal is the action that illuminates the ultimate dissolution of the hierarchy that Rāmānuja recognizes and allows his theology to truly synthesize the teachings of Vedānta with those of Śrīvaiṣṇava. This role reversal is not symbolic; the devotee is actually empowered.

In Indian history there is little that is not open for debate, particularly where authorship and dating are concerned. Therefore, it is surprising that there is almost universal agreement that Rāmānuja authored nine works all in Sanskrit. Two centuries after Rāmānuja, Sudarśana Sūri makes the first undisputable reference to Rāmānuja's Saṇskrit writings. Sūri was the last great Viśiṣṭādvaita teacher before it split into southern and northern schools, and the first great commentator on Rāmānuja.[1] Of these nine works three will be most important to this argument: *Śrībhāṣya*, *Bhagavadgītābhāṣy (Gītābhāṣya), and Vedārthasaṃgraha.* Rāmānuja's most famous work is the *Śrībhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Vedānta Sutra*-s. Rāmānuja's only independent work, a summary of the meaning of all Veda-s*,* is the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, and contains his exposition on the master servant relationship and is of primary importance in understanding the hierarchy of the divine devotee relationship discussed here. The final arguments of this work rely on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*, a work better known than the *Vedārthasaṃgraha.* The thoughts expressed in the *Gītābhāṣya* are consistent with Rāmānuja's other works, but as Carman comments there is a somewhat "different mood," a focus on the emotional aspects of devotion.[2]

Rāmānuja: Life and Intellectual Milieu

In Perumbūdūr (near modern day Madras) in 1017 CE. Illaya Perumal was born into the Brahmin family of Keśava Yajvan and his wife Kāntimatī.[3] Kāntimatī was the sister of Mahāpūrṇa, disciple of Yāmuna, who was Viśiṣṭādvaita's most revered scholar. Because of this, Kāntimatī provided her

young son with an important lineage. The boy's immortal lineage is often held to be as the incarnation of Lakṣmaṇa, brother to Viṣṇu's *avatara* (divine incarnation) Rāma.[4] What is certain is that this young boy, over a prodigious 120 year life span, would become Rāmānuja, the philosopher who synthesized Vedānta philosophy with the Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* (devotion to Viṣṇu) of the South Indian ĀĪvār-s.[5] The young Rāmānuja was sent first to study Vedānta with the prestigious teacher Yādava Prakāśa, a follower of the famous non-dualist Śaṇkara. This orthodoxed Advaitan beginning provided an important intellectual point of resistance for Rāmānuja, who would become the dominant voice of Viśiṣṭādvaita and successor to Yāmuna, acclaimed teacher of this school.[6]

Little is known of the details of Rāmānuja's early life. We do know that in keeping with Brahmin tradition he was married at sixteen. This marriage, arranged by his father, was an unhappy match. Rāmānuja's wife was unwilling to relinquish orthodox etiquette, which was somewhat elitist in its requirements regarding the separation between castes, and intense purity practices. On multiple occasions she was rude to Rāmānuja's disciples and guests, even refusing alms to a poor Brahmin. Thus the future saint conspired to be rid of her and realize his desire to take vows of renunciation (*sannyāsa*). Rāmānuja forged a letter from his father-in-law announcing a younger sister's wedding and requesting his daughter's return for the celebration. Rāmānuja's wife complied, and in her absence Rāmānuja took the renunciate's vows, affectively abandoning her to her family.[7] Though Rāmānuja himself became an ascetic "his theology

was an effort to combine social duties, religious worship, devotion and the practice of meditation and contemplation into one harmonious whole."[8]

Rāmānuja aroused the ire of his first teacher Yādava by contesting his interpretations of sacred texts. The tension between teacher and student became so strong that Yādava saw Rāmānuja as a threat to Advaita (non-dualism). This threat was believed to be so serious that a plot was developed to murder Rāmānuja.

> Yādava became very much annoyed with Rāmānuja and arranged a plot, according to which Rāmānuja was to be thrown into the Ganges while on pilgrimage to Allahabad. Govinda divulged the plot to Rāmānuja, who was thus able to wander away from the company and retire to Kāñci.[9]

This would be the first, but not the last, plot to harm Rāmānuja. Hagiographies are filled with stories of attempts to harm or defame him. The tension between Rāmānuja and Yādava was resolved years later when Yādava was urged to visit Rāmānuja. Yādava attempted to defeat the younger scholar in a debate but he was defeated instead. Rāmānuja treated the old scholar with great compassion and in response Yādava became a renowned Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakta* (devotee of Viṣṇu). This is a dramatic example of a classic philosophical conflict, showing the tolerance/superiority of Viśiṣṭādvaita in comparison to the belligerent intolerance/inferiority of Advaita.[10]

Rāmānuja was raised and educated in a religious environment, which by the Middle Ages had become extremely diverse. The most ancient of these communities was the Śrīvaiṣṇava community of the Āḻvār-s. These poet saints,

ecstatics, possessed with a deep intuitive knowledge of god, were largely responsible for the songs that gave Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* its intense emotional quality.[11] To reconstruct the actual time frame of the Āḻvār-s and their writings requires the correlation of many pieces of data: temple inscriptions referencing cities and ruling dynasties; mention of the Āḻvār-s in literary commentaries; and inclusion in chronologies of the succession of *guru*-s. This complex method of dating has produced traditional dates for the Āḻvār-s as early as 4,203 BCE; however, modern researchers date the Āḻvār-s from the middle of the seventh century to the middle of the ninth century CE.[12]

The twelve Āḻvār-s came from every caste of life: one low caste *Pannar,* two *śūdra*-s*,* one *Kṣattriya,* seven *Brahmin*-s and a woman. The most well known compellation of the Āḻvār-s works, *Nālāyiradivyaprabandham* (the 4,000 devotional verses) was compiled by Nāthamuni in the middle of the tenth century.[13] Nāthamuni was the grandfather of Yāmuna (918-1038 CE), *guru* of Rāmānuja's uncle Mahāpūrṇa.[14] The collection and subsequent setting of these verses to music in the Vedic tradition allowed them to be elevated to a level equal to the *Veda*-s, and resulted in their popular regard as "Tamil Veda."[15] These ecstatic hymns focused on the experience of deep devotion to god and are not logically complete as a philosophy. Dominant themes in the hymns are intense devotion with many descriptions of the beauty and greatness of the lord:

> All places, shinning like great lotus pools
> On a blue mountain broad, to me are but
> The beauties of his eye – the lord of earth
> Girt by the roaring sea, heaven's lord, the lord

Of other good souls, black – hued lord – and mine![16]

And also; for the preference of the tension of passionate yearning for god or devotion in separation:

> Day and night she knows not sleep
> In floods of tears her eyes do swim
> Lotus-like eyes! She weeps and reels,
> Ah! How without thee can I bear;
> She pants and feels all earth for Him.[17]

While this devotional poetry is not concerned with theological consistency, certain recurring themes do allow scholars to extract from the hymns ideas that can support philosophic exposition. These ideas include the importance of self surrender (*prapatti*), the benefit of service to God, and the execution of divine grace. Āḻvār-s were the ultimate followers of the path of self surrender *(prapanna bhakti*-s). They saw absolute self-surrender to God as the ideal way to achieve release from the cycle of death and rebirth (*mokṣa).* [18] Their greatest influence on Rāmānuja, besides their intensely beautiful devotional hymns was their development of the concepts of *prapatti* (self-surrender) and *bhakti* (devotion). Yāmuna posthumously imparted the teachings of the Āḻvār-s to Rāmānuja via his disciples.

Through his mother and her brother Mahāpurṇa, Rāmānuja was introduced to the teachings of Yāmuna (918-1038 CE), the Vaiṣṇava teacher who would most influence his thinking. Through this connection with Yāmuna, Rāmānuja's philosophical lineage could be extended beyond the age of the

Āḻvār-s to the *bhakta* community of the Bhagavata (noble lord, common epithet of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu). Rāmānuja was schooled in the works of Yāmuna by listening to his uncle's recitation of the *guru's* works, especially the *Strota-ratnam.* In this work Yāmuna stresses the doctrine of self-surrender (*prapatti),* one of the most important doctrines passed down from the Āḻvār-s.

Rāmānuja was on his way to meet Yāmuna, who had already named him his successor, but the older teacher died before his arrival. When Rāmānuja arrived and saw the deceased teacher with three fingers twisted together, Rāmānuja proclaimed that he would finish the three unfulfilled aims of the teacher. First, he was to make the community well-versed and converted to the Śrīvaisṇava (devotionalism of the Āḻvār-s) doctrine of *papatti* and the works of the Āḻvār-s. Second, he was to write a Śrīvaiṣṇava commentary on the *Brahma Sutra.* Thirdly, he was to write many works on Śrīvaiṣṇava. The official teachings of Yāmuna were imparted to Rāmānuja by Kañcīpūṇa; however, he was initiated by his uncle Mahāpūrṇa. It was during this time that Rāmānuja took *sannyāsin* after disposing of his wife through less than saintly means.[19]

Rāmānuja's first formal education was in Advaita Vedānta and came from the well-established teacher Yādava (ca.1033 CE), a disciple of Śaṇkara. This relationship with Yādava provided Rāmānuja with traditional Vedic teachings and those of the philosophy of Śaṇkara. This encounter with Śaṇkara's philosophy is what he reacted to most strongly in developing his own theology. Yādava and Rāmānuja had their greatest disagreements over interpretations of the *Upaniṣad-*

s, which Yādava interpreted entirely non-dualistically, and to which Rāmānuja applied qualified non-dualism. A famous dispute over the translation of *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 1.6-7 resulted in Rāmānuja's final ouster from study with Yādava.[20] *Tasya yathā kapyāsam puṇḍarikamevam akṣinī* is translated by Yādava: "Brahman had eyes which resembled the posteriors of a monkey," i.e. red eyes. Rāmānuja could not bear such coarseness and argued:

> *kapsyāsam* means 'blossomed by the sun'. *Ka* means water and *pibati* signifies 'drinking'. *Kapi* means that which drinks water, the sun or the lotus stalk. *Asa* is to open. *Puṇḍriīka* is the lotus. Hence he interpreted it as meaning that God has eyes like the lotus which blooms before the morning sun.[21]

This conflict illustrated that Rāmānuja had developed more sophisticated Saṇskrit skills than his teacher, and had also developed the ability to argue against his teacher and prevail.

An earlier conflict between Rāmānuja and Yādava is said to illustrate a "crucial difference between Śankara's Advaita and Rāmāmanuja's Viśiṣṭadvaita – the fact that 'the Ultimate' for the former is said to be without attributes, is a claim which is denied by the latter on the grounds of making no sense."[22] In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* we are told Brahman is truth, knowledge and bliss: *Satyam, jñānam, ānantam brahma.* Yādava translates this as Brahman is these things, thus eliminating the possibility for him to possess these attributes. Rāmānuja objects to this as a *reductio ad absurdum* that results in the Supreme Person being a non-entity. Rāmānuja argued, "'These are his but not Him; as the body is mine, I am not the body.'"[23] For Rāmānuja Brahman's existence demands

attributes and there is no contradiction in Him possessing multiple attributes. It is completely consistent for the non-dualistic Brahman to be the transcendent source of all reality and a personal lord; he can assume any material form as he is the stuff of all material forms. "It was like redness, softness and fragrance, co-existing in a flower without contradicting one another."[24] This critical point is Rāmānuja's qualification of the non-dualism, which allows for its synthesis with dualistic schools of Vedānta, and the devotionalism of Śrīviaṣnava. If Brahman is the substance from which all matter is composed, then there is no conflict in Him assuming material form as personal lord. Brahman is both beyond matter having no qualities, and all matter possessing all qualities. This crucial difference between Yādava's non-dualism and Rāmānuja's upbringing in the devotionalism of the Āḻvar-s ultimately caused the separation of the two scholars.

There is one other theological position to which Rāmānuja had to respond, that of Islam. In 711 CE, less than 100 years after the death of Muhammad, Muslims began entering the Sind and western coast of India. At this stage the Islamic religion was still defining itself. Islam lacked a strong orthodoxy, and as a result Islamic and Hindu culture engaged one another on more or less equal ground. This coupled with the fact the Islam did not enter the continent as a political force until the ninth century, allowed Hindus the hope of giving more than they were forced to receive.[25] Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries there were various pockets and periods of Muslim rule. Islam was founded on the belief that the purpose of human life was submission to and worship of Allah,

the one omnipotent God. The end of man was not his own satisfaction, perfection or self realization, but service to the one God. [26] To a degree the medieval philosophical surge in Hinduism was motivated by a desire to define and distinguish Hinduism from Islam. It is possible that Rāmānuja's desire to reconcile the contradictions of Vedānta was in part a desire, not only to put his beloved *bhakti* on equal footing with orthodox beliefs, but also to present a unified front against Muslim competition.

The influences of esteemed teachers and the pressure of the introduction of Islam helped Rāmānuja form his theology. The only independent exposition of his thoughts is found in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha;* all his other works are commentaries on other great Sanskrit texts. These commentaries contain the ideas he was taught as well as those he developed himself. His works were religious debates with others in his community as well as debates with those outside Hinduism.

Defining the Devotee and the Divine

The Devotee/ Finite Self/ Servant

The devotee is the finite self (*jīvātmā*). Here the Sanskrit compound consists of the verbal root *jīv,* "to live" and the noun *ātman*, "the individual or abstract self." A famous story about the dictation of the *Śrībhāṣya,* reveals a great deal about Rāmānuja's concept of the finite self. Rāmānuja is said to have given license to his scribe and disciple Kūreśa to stop him whenever he heard something with which he did not agree. During dictation, Rāmānuja defined the

finite self as one "whose essential nature is wholly consciousness, or that which has cognition alone as its distinguishing attribute."[27] Kūreśa stopped writing because for him this definition was as good as no definition because it left out the soul's most important characteristic, its liegeship to God (*śeṣatva).* Defining the soul as consciousness alone without it being essentially related to God ignored its most essential relationship and without this relationship nothing said of the soul made any sense. For Kūreṣa the soul without a relationship to God was the same as light existing without the sun. Once Rāmānuja noticed his disciple had stopped writing he kicked Kūreṣa and stormed away. Rāmānuja later reflected on the subject and realized that a definition of the soul that included its belonging to God was foundational for his theology.[28] Kūreṣa had recognized that this definition of the finite soul as "wholly consciousness" was simply the non-dualism of Advaita, and in no way asserted the Śrīvaiṣṇava theology. To affirm the authority of a devotional relationship the finite soul had to be distinct from the Divine in a way that revealed its subordination. To define the finite soul as "wholly consciousness," did not provide the distinction necessary to support the devotional relationship which was the core of Śrīvaiṣṇava. Whether this episode is fact or fiction, it is a dramatic representation meant to emphatically illustrate Rāmānuja's thinking. What is revealed here is that Rāmānuja's first thoughts on the definition of the finite self were non-dualistic and that he was consciously committed to reconciling this with the devotional relationship of Śrīvaiṣṇava.

In the beginning of the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* paragraph 17b-18a, Carman finds a succinct statement of Rāmānuja's distinctive metaphysical doctrine.

> The finite self [jīvātmā] has Brahman as its Self, for it is His mode [prakāra] since it is the body [śarīra] of Brahman … All things having one of the varieties of characteristic physical structure, such as the divine form or the human form, are the modes of finite individual selves, since they are their respective bodies. This means that these physical objects, too, are ensouled by Brahman. Therefore all words naming these objects … first signify the objects they name in ordinary parlance, then through these objects, the finite selves dwelling in them and finally these words extend in their significance to denote the Supreme Self [Paramātmā].[29]

Rāmānuja uses the understanding of the relationship of the soul to the body as expressed in Śrīvaiṣṇava, but he changes the language to that of substance to mode. Rāmānuja used these relationships to create a system of understanding that allowed the finite self to be both transcendent and at the same time subordinate to the Supreme Self. Material bodies and forms are the mode/body of the finite self, which is their soul/substance. The finite self is the mode/body of the Supreme Self, which is its soul/substance. This gives the relational definition of the finite self and the Supreme Self that Kūreṣa required, and bridged the apparent contradiction between Advaita and Śrīvaiṣṇava. Rāmānuja's definition of the finite self used a "this and that also" logic of comparison that he will repeat, and eventually will allow for the dissolution of hierarchy between the Divine and the devotee.

The Divine/ Supreme Person/ Master

In order for Rāmānuja to synthesize the doctrines of Śrīvaiṣṇava devotion with those of Advaita his definition of the Supreme Person had to be complex

enough to reconcile the abstract Supreme Person with the individual Personal Lord. The Divine is the Supreme Self, the *paramātmā* or *puruṣottama*. The compounds *para* meaning highest, supreme or chief, and *uttama* meaning highest or ultimate, when combined with *ātmā* or *puruṣa* (person) denote a soul or person of exceptional status the Supreme Person. The Divine has copious definitions, names and epithets. To gain a full sense of who the Divine is we will turn to Carman's examination of the dedicatory verses from the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* and the *Gītābhāṣya*.

It is customary in Sanskrit literature to begin with a dedicatory verse (*mangalaśloka).* This verse *(śloka)* is meant to summarize the work's contents and provide an auspicious *(mangala*) beginning by extolling the virtues of a deity or *guru* related to the subject matter. From the Vedārthasaṃgraha we have:

> Obeisance to Viṣṇu, who is the treasury of auspicious qualities, which are infinite and untainted by any impurity, who is the Śeṣī of entities without exception, both spiritual and material, and who reclines on the primordial serpent Śeṣa.[30]

Here the deity is Viṣṇu who holds all wondrous and potent qualities that are infinite and pure. He is the undisputed master of all things spiritual and material. He rests on the primordial serpent named Śeṣa, a name that means servant, and an image that will be important later in this discussion.

In the Śribhāṣya 1.1.1:

> May my understanding attain the nature of devotion to the Supreme, the abode of Śrī [Lakṣmī], the Brahman who is luminously revealed in the Crown of Scripture [the Upaniṣads], whose sport [līlā] consists in such acts as the origination, maintenance and destruction of all the worlds,

> who had dedicated Himself entirely [eka-dikṣā] to protecting and saving [rakṣā] the hosts of various kinds of creatures who bow before Him.[31]

The Supreme Brahman of the Upaniṣad-s is the consort of Śrī (the Goddess). Creating, maintaining and dissolving all worlds are His pastime. His one focus is saving and protecting all creatures who are devoted to Him.

Later in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* the Supreme Person is further defined:

> The essential nature [svarūpa] of the Inner Controller is as follows: He is the sole cause of the origination, continued existence, and dissolution of the universe consisting of such varieties of intelligent beings and material things, and is the sole cause of the cessation of saṃsara. His essential nature is distinct from all entities other than Himself by virtue of His opposition to all evil and His being wholly infinite perfection [kalyāntā]. He has a host of such auspicious qualities [kalyāguṇas], which are countless and of matchless excellence. He is known throughout the Upaniṣads by different terms such as " The Self of all," "the Supreme Brahman," "the Supreme Light," "the Supreme Reality," "the Supreme Self," and "Being." He is the Lord (Bhagavān, Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person [Puruṣottama]. [32]

From all these verses combined we know that for Rāmānuja the Supreme Brahman of the Upaniṣad-s is Viṣṇu/Nārāyana the creator, preserver and destroyer of all worlds. He is the consort of Śrī and He possesses all infinite, excellent and untainted qualities. He is wholly distinct from all things and beings because of His opposition to all evil and His complete perfection. Singularly devoted to saving His devotees, He is the sole cause of release from the cycle of death and rebirth. He is the uncontestable master of all things material and spiritual and rests on the primordial Śeṣa. This image of the master resting on the primordial Śeṣa/servant is the first indication of the reversal and dissolution

of the cosmic hierarchy, which Rāmānuja will develop in both his *Gītābhāṣya* and *Vedārthasaṃgraha.*

Understanding the definitions of the finite person and the Supreme Person are necessary for any discussion of their relationship to have meaning. These definitions are important keys for achieving Rāmānuja's theological goal of synthesizing the teachings of Vedānta with those of Śrīvaiṣṇava. The ideas concerning the nature of the Supreme Person and His abstraction verses His material form in Vedānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava are complex. Rāmānuja must reconcile these complex ideas if he is to achieve his theological goal. Therefore a deeper understanding of the specific attributes of the Supreme Person is necessary in order to understand the logic that Rāmānuja ultimately extends to the reversal and dissolution of the cosmic hierarchy between the Divine and the devotee.

The Divine Accessibility and Inaccessibility

Carman finds the introduction to the *Gītābhāṣya* to be Rāmānuja's "central text" on the study of the doctrine of the Divine/ Supreme Person.[33] The introduction contains two distinct sections concerning the inaccessibility and accessibility of the Divine. Carman argues that these two concepts (inaccessibility and accessibility) are Rāmānuja's keys to solving theological and philosophical contradictions. The first section opens with a description of the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*) that lists His attributes:

> Who is an ocean of auspicious attributes of matchless excellence inherent In His nature, the first six of which are knowledge, untiring strength, sovereignty, immutability, creative power, and splendor. [34]

This section closes with a clear statement of His inaccessibility:

> This Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person [Puruṣottama], when He created The entire universe of everything from the god Brahmā to motionless stones, remains with His same essential nature [svena-rūpeṇa] and is inaccessible even by such means as the meditation and worship of men or of gods like Brahmā.[35]

In this first section we are told the Supreme Person possesses every auspicious quality and is incomparable to any other. He creates and dissolves the universe and all its creatures of his own volition without a necessary end. Yet in the midst of creating an ever-changing universe He remains unchanged in His essential nature.[36] This is an abstract Divinity and is by definition not material. This is the Supreme Person that the proponents of Advaita aspire to, yet He is ultimately inaccessible. This is not the Supreme Person with qualities, a Personal Lord, which is necessary for the devotional relationship of Śrivaiṣṇava.

The second section describes the Supreme Person in terms that establish his earthly form and imply his accessibility.

> Being a shoreless ocean of compassion, gracious condescension, forgiving love [or motherly affection (vātsalya)] and generosity, while still not losing His own inherent nature and attributes [sva-svabhāvam-ajahad-eva], He has assumed His own bodily form [svam-eva-rūpam], which on each occasion has the same generic structure as one of the various classes of creatures, and in these various shapes He has descended again and again to the various worlds where they dwell, where having been worshiped by these different kinds of creatures, He has granted them whatever they prayed for, whether meritorious action, wealth, physical pleasure or deliverance, according to their own desire. [37]

This Supreme Person is one of action in relationship to someone or something. Actions of compassion, gracious condescension, forgiving love and generosity,

require another to participate in the process for the action to occur. Through these qualities the Supreme Person makes himself accessible to the devotee: "He has assumed His own bodily form"; "He has descended again and again to the various worlds."[38] This is the Divinity of Śrivaiṣṇava, a Personal Lord with bodily form. According to Rāmānuja, to understand the Divine fully is to realize that the abstract Divinity and the Personal Lord are one in the same. For Carman, understanding Rāmānuja's distinction between the Supreme Person's inaccessibility and accessibility is the key to understanding how he reconciled the apparent logical inconsistency in Vedanta. However Rāmānuja does not apply the categories of inaccessibility and accessibility with the precision of his commentators. Why then does Carman give such emphasis to these two categories? In examining the relationship between the Divine and the devotee Carman determines that these categories define many of the interactions between the Divine and the devotee.

Later commentators on Rāmānuja's use *paratva* (supremacy) to indicate inaccessibility of the Supreme Person and *saulabhya* (easily attainable) to indicate His accessibility. Rāmānuja himself does not use *paratva* and *saulabhya* with the technical precision that his commentators do, however these distinctions seem to be accurate representations of his theology according to Carman.[39] The adjective *para* (high, supreme) and its abstract noun *paratva* (supremacy) support the dual distinctions that were revealed previously in the introduction to the *Gītābhāṣya.* The abstract noun *paratva* (supremacy) describes the Supreme

Person as being the essence of supremacy, not possessing supremacy as a quality. The non-dualists define the Ultimate Reality, what in Rāmānuja's words is the Supreme Person, as being *nirguṇa* (without qualities) the abstract substance of all reality. This is the non-dualist position: the Supreme Person does not have qualities, he is the abstract essence of a quality. For the non-dualists if the Ultimate Reality possesses qualities it becomes limited and cannot be the Ultimate Reality. Because the larger part of Rāmānuja's work is to reveal the devotionalism of Śrivaiṣṇava as being on par with non-dualistic Vedānta*,* he will rely most on the adjective *para* (high, supreme). This adjectival use is best suited to his firm assertion that the Supreme Person is not only a general form, but also a concrete Person with a bodily form with qualities, supreme over or higher than the finite soul. This is the place where the Supreme Person is inaccessible to the finite soul, and this inaccessibility supports the Vedantic position that the Supreme Person is the Ultimate Reality.

The abstract noun accessibility (*saulabhya)* is a term never used by Rāmānuja, and the adjective "accessible" or "easily attainable" (*sulabha*) is rarely used by him.[40] Later commentators on Rāmānuja do use the term *saulabhya* to describe the concept of the Supreme Person's accessibility. It is therefore important to question whether or not we can speak of Rāmānuja's concept of the Supreme Person as having accessibility as one of its most important categories because he never uses the term. Carman does not see placing the attributes of the Supreme Person into the category of accessibility as a distortion of

Rāmānuja's thoughts. Carman uses the category of accessibility to describe what Rāmānuja identifies as the actions of the Supreme Person when He has assumed bodily form. For Carman this use is supported by examination of the writings of commentators who do use this category with precision to reflect on Rāmānuja. This use by the commentators is strongly supported by one of Rāmānuja's rare uses of the adjective *sulabha* in the *Gītābhāṣya* 8.14.
"For the one who constantly remembers Me and never lets his thoughts stray to any other object for this disciplined yogī, I am easily attainable [sulabhaḥ]."[41]
Rāmānuja's use of the idea of easy attainability or accessibility is argued by Carman to be a pragmatic avoidance of undermining the concept of Divine grace. Rāmānuja is taking care lest he mislead the devotee with the thought of effortless access by failing to uphold the supremacy of Divine grace. Achieving the discipline of a *yogī* is famously difficult, and Rāmānuja wants to be clear that no amount of even superhuman effort will result in the attainment of the Highest Lord without the extension of Divine grace. It is because of the gift of Divine grace that the Highest Person can be easily obtained. This mystery of *sulabha* is revealed in Rāmānuja's comment on the previously stated verse from Gītābhāṣya 8.14:

> And I am easily attained [suprāpaśca], for unable to bear separation from him (the highest kind of devotee who cannot live without Me), I Myself choose him [aham-eva-tam vṛṇe], and it is I Myself who grant [aham-eva-dadāmi] him the fruition of His meditation[42]

In Śrivaiṣṇava understanding, intense devotion (*bhakti*) is the way to union with the Divine. Once the devotee (*bhakta*) has achieved the difficult state of one-

pointed focus on the Divine, he is irresistible to the Divine. *Bhakta*, from the verbal root *bhaj* "to share with", implies a requisite exchange between the devotee and its object. When the *bhakta* becomes irresistible to the Divine, the Divine cannot help but extend grace. It is this irresistibility and subsequent extension of Divine grace that warrants the use of the adjective *sulabha* according to Rāmānuja.

While Rāmānuja does not use the terms *paratva* and *saulabhya* with the precision of his later commentators, the tension that results from the polarity between inaccessibility and accessibility is present in his writings according Carman.

> Sometimes the distinction seems to be between two halves that complement each other harmoniously but at other times this distinction, though never becoming a separation, does indicate a certain tension between two poles in the Divine nature, a tension that not only makes possible the reconciliation of seemingly divergent and contradictory traditions but also provides the inner dynamic and liveliness in Rāmānuja's thought.[43]

Rāmānuja is trying to reconcile the path of devotion to a Personal Lord with that of the realization of unity with an abstract Ultimate Reality. Carman astutely realizes that inaccessibility and accessibility are the categories that allow for the movement back and forth between the abstract Ultimate Reality and the Personal Lord. Later in this discussion these same categories of inaccessibility and accessibility will open the way for the reversal and dissolution of the cosmic hierarchy between the Divine and the devotee.

Svarūpa and Svabhāva: The Essential and Material Nature of the Supreme Person

To understand the essence and defining attributes of the Supreme Person as Rāmānuja did will require unpacking several different concepts, among them those concerning the essential and material nature of the Supreme Person. Carman notes that, unlike his later commentators, Rāmānuja is not given to the use of rigid categories when it comes to defining the Divine essence.[44] Rāmānuja's inquiry into the nature of the Supreme Person requires that he clarify His essential and necessary nature as well as identifying His defining material attributes. It is the separation between the Supreme Person's essential attributes, those which are His alone, and those attributes that exist when He is in relationship to something else that is the key understanding Rāmānuja's synthesis of the Vedānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava. It is Rāmānuja's understanding of the Supreme Person's simultaneous expression of abstract essential nature and His material attributes that allows the communion of devotion to flow into union, and for both to function with equanimity. For Rāmānuja this is how a devotional relationship, that on the surface appears to be one of communion, can ultimately allow for complete union with the abstract Supreme Person.

Rāmānuja uses the terms *svarūpa* and *svabhāva* to describe two types of Divine essence. These terms are more or less synonymous. They literally mean "form of one's own" and "being of one's own" and are generally used to mean essence or inherent nature. Sundarśana Sūri, the first great commentator on

Rāmānuja, will separate these terms into clear categories. Sūri classifies *svarūpa* as the five essential attributes from the Upaniṣad-s, which will be discussed later, and adds Divine lordship (*iśitṛtva)* to these five*.* He classifies *svabhāva* with the accessibility of the Supreme Person and His attributes in the relation to the finite self. Professor Rangachar, a modern commentator, distinguishes these two terms as follows. S*varūpa,* refers to the parts of the Divine that cannot change, and *svabhāva* refers to those that can change.[45]

The essential nature of Brahman/Supreme Person is defined in *Śribhāṣya'* 3.3.13 as being in two classes: those that are inherently Brahman and those that exist in Brahman only in relation to some object.

> Those other qualities which are "equal to the thing" i.e., which are attributes determining the essential nature of the thing [svarūpa-nirūpaṇa-dharma] and therefore necessarily entering into the idea of the thing, must be included in all meditations, no less than the thing itself. To this class belong qualities such as true being, knowledge, bliss, purity, infinity, and so on. For the essential definition of Brahman-which had been suggested by texts such as "that from which all these beings," etc., as the cause of the world –is given in texts "the True, knowledge, infinite is Brahman," "bliss is Brahman," and others; and hence, in order that a true notion may be formed of Brahman as the object of meditation, such qualities as true being, bliss, and so on, have to be included in all meditations on Brahman. Such additional qualities, on the other hand, as, for example, compassion, which indeed cannot exist apart from the subject to which they belong but are not necessary elements of the idea of Brahman, are to be included in those meditations only where they are specifically mentioned.[46]

Rāmānuja seems to be making a distinction between defining essential qualities of Brahman and those qualities that belong to Him but not essentially or necessarily so. This definition of the Brahman's *svarūpa* seems to come clearly

on the side of the traditional Upaniṣadic definition of the five defining attributes of: knowledge (*jñana),* bliss *(ānanda)*, infinity *(ananta),* truth (*satya),* purity (*amlatva).*[47] However, Carman observes that the use of the phrase "and so on" following this list of the five defining attributes undermines any simple definition of *svarūpa.* Carman classifies Rāmānuja's use of *svarūpa* as:

1. to express the Upaniṣadic definition of the Self;
2. to qualify the first definition in such a way as to make clear the distinction between the Supreme Self and the finite self is (a) emphasizing Brahman's uniqueness, or distinctness from all other entities, and (b) emphasizing that the nature of Brahman is fundamentally and essentially free from and opposed to all impurity;
3. to include all the auspicious qualities of Brahman, both the qualities that express His Lordship and all other qualities, but to exclude all the spiritual and material entities which, though 'parts" of Him as His body (śarīra) an His mode (pradāra), are subject to modification;
4. still to exclude all the material universe and the souls attached to the bodies within it but to include in God's essential nature His eternal realm and all persons (divine attendants) and objects of enjoyment within it, and preeminently the immaterial (aprākṛta) bodily form (rūpa or vigraha) of the Supreme Person.[48]

Svabhāva is used in ways that are consistently broader than *svarūpa.* When used together *svarūpa* refers to the five defining attributes and *svabhāva* refers to attributes outside the five. *Svabhāva* is very often used to define those attributes that are the result of the Supreme Person's interaction with some object distinct from Himself. Carman determines that it is reasonable to understand *svabhāva* as pertaining to attributes beyond the five defining attributes, and *svarūpa* as limited to the five defining attributes, but he does not see this as providing a complete understanding of their use.[49] In the introduction to the *Gītābhāṣya* the Supreme Person is defined as:

> [*He*] Who is an ocean of auspicious attributes of matchless excellence inherent In His nature, the first six of which are knowledge, untiring strength, sovereignty, immutability, creative power, and splendor.[50]

These six qualities listed above are the *ṣaḍguṇa*-s of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and are qualities that Rāmānuja also includes as "inherent in His nature." At this point it seems that essence of the Supreme person is so fluid that nothing definitive can be determined concerning the subtle distinction that Rāmānuja held concerning *svarūpa* and *svabhāva.* It is still not clear what Rāmānuja understood as the essence of the Supreme Person.

In order to obtain anything that resembles a true understanding of how Rāmānuja envisioned the Divine essence, Carman turns to a speculation based on the story of the dictation of the *Śribhāṣya.* This is the episode discussed earlier where Rāmānuja defines the finite soul as that which is "wholly consciousness" and he has to be reminded by his disciple Kūreṣa that this is an incomplete definition. Carman speculates:

> According to this incident, Rāmānuja had to be reminded by one of his followers of the second relation definition of the finite self, which in the Śrivaiṣṇava doctrine of the soul must accompany the first definition drawn from the Upaniṣad-s. This story reveals more than a preference of Rāmānuja for the Upaniṣadic teaching or a result of his long training in Vedānta; it also shows that his first thought about svarūpa was as a distinct essence or substance, not as a definition of a relation to other entities. The first definition is the same for the finite self and the Supreme Self; they both have the nature of consciousness, whose knowledge of itself is sheer joy. For the finite self, however, this definition has to be supplemented, since it owes its very existence to the Supreme Self, for whom and in whom it exists. In the case of the Supreme Self, on the other hand, who is completely self-subsistent, *His essential nature can be defined without reference to His relation to any other entity.*[51]

Thus we are left with the understanding that in Rāmānuja's vision of the Supreme Person what defines His inherent nature is separate from what defines Him in relation to the cosmos. The Supreme Person alone exists in a separate reality from finite persons. Thus to define the Supreme Person there must be a distinction between His essence, separate from the created reality, and His role in relation to finite selves. Carman sees the subtle distinction in the use of *svarūpa* and *svabhāva* as addressing the Supreme Person's essence in these two separate realities, both realities being contained within His ultimate reality.[52]

The Defining Attributes of the Supreme Person

Paratva (supremacy) and *saulabhya* (accessibility) characterize the Supreme Person's relation to finite souls; s*varūpa* and *svabhāva* describe the Supreme Person's essence.[53] Rāmānuja intends to resolve the abstract Supreme Person of Advaita with the Supreme Person as Personal Lord of Śrivaiṣṇava. This requires a definition of the Supreme Person that both establishes His differences from finite souls as well as His relationship to them and the two previous classifications address this need. Rāmānuja also aims to define the Supreme Person in a way that addresses what he believes are the major misconceptions that result from the logic of Advaita, according to Carmen these are:

1) the Supreme Person is subject to ignorance and afflicted with illusion and hence undergoes transmigration
2) the Supreme Person is connected with limiting adjuncts and is thus over whelmed by karma
3) the Supreme Person is the abode of imperfection [54]

What Rāmānuja defines as the essence of the Supreme Person must refute the above as well as support his theology. Rāmānuja was working to reveal logical consistency between Advaita and the devotionalism of Śrivaiṣṇava. This required that he bring the Śrivaiṣṇava practices of worship of a Personal Lord for achieving union with Him, and those of meditation and realization of unity in an abstract Supreme Person into a logical whole. His theology was an attempt to create a synthesis where both these teachings could be revered as authoritative.

As was discussed during the exposition on Divine *svarūpa,* Rāmānuja sees the five defining attributes described in the Upaniṣad-s as the essential defining attributes of the Supreme Person. These five are *jñana* (knowledge), *ānanda* (bliss), *satya* (truth)*, ananta* (infinitude), and *amalatva* (purity), all adjectives that imply the supremacy of the Supreme Person as well as draw the distinction between Him and the finite self. Of these the first two *jñana* and *ānanda* are the most notable in the Upaniṣad-s and everywhere accepted as the absolute essence of the Supreme Person.

It is in the fifth quality, *amalatva* (purity) that Rāmānuja sees as the attribute most distinct to the Supreme Person, separating Him most from finite souls. This is the point from which Rāmānuja attacks his philosophical opponents. He intends to show that the Supreme Person can be embodied and not defiled. The Supreme Person is not subject to *karma,* and even though He possesses qualities he is in no way inferior to the finite self. The Advaitans argue that any concept of the Supreme Person with qualities (*saguṇa*) is inferior to that

of a Supreme Person without qualities (*nirguṇa),* thus relegating the Personal Lord of Śrivaiṣṇava to a lower status in comparison to their understanding. Rāmānuja denies that there is any being higher than the Personal Lord, Himself the Supreme Brahman, and he applies both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* to the Supreme Person. Carman says:

> Rāmānuja denies that embodiment proves dependence on karma (and hence contact with evil), since a being who has the power of realizing His will can simply will to assume a body. Nor is the body of the Supreme Self subject to the defects of material nature (prakṛti), for it is not an effect of prakṛti but a body that is in accordance with His own desire and suited to His own nature.[55]

Rāmānuja is again arguing that the Supreme Person can assume any form and maintain His ultimate supremacy to everything created, and he argues that is is His purity that assures this. The Supreme Person may choose a form but his is in no way limited by the constraints of that form, thus all the assertions about Him in the Vedānta and Śrivaiṣṇava are valid. This concept is further illuminated in the following section.

The Supreme Person as Material and Efficient Cause of the Universe

Rāmānuja is committed to *ekam-eva* (one only), a philosophy that there is a fundamental cause of all matter, which is different than specific finite causes. He sees this universal causality as a mark of the Supreme Person's supremacy and thus it is another important key to his theology. [56] In the *Śribhāṣya* 1.1.13 it is explained:

> That which is called "Being" [sat], i.e., the Supreme Brahman free from any trace of evil, possessing a host of countless auspicious qualities of matchless excellence together with the power ever to accomplish His will, who is the cause of everything willed thus: "May I be many!" After He had created [or projected, sṛṣṭvā] the entire universe consisting of the elements of fire, water, etc., He caused the whole mass of individual souls to enter into this universe existing in the form of a magnificent variety [vicitra] of material bodies such as those of the gods, etc., each intelligent soul [jīva] into a body befitting its own particular karma where it became the self [ātmā] of that body. Then He Himself, wholly of His own accord [svecchayaiva] entered these souls as their Inner Self and thus evolved names and form in these bodies which hitherto were mere aggregates of matter; i.e., He made each aggregate a particular thing or substantial object [vatsu] that could be designated with a word or name [śabda].[57]

Brahman is a state of Primordial Being and is therefore the material cause of the universe. This Primordial Being is a state where every sort of intelligent and non-intelligent entity as well as the Supreme Being, while still separate, are so tightly compressed they cannot be differentiated. Brahman is the intelligent cause of the universe, because he willed, "May I be many!", and by this action all variety of material entities come into ordered being.[58] Brahman moved and from His infinite reality came forth as all the forms in the universe.

Rāmānuja accepts the Saṃkhya doctrine of *satkāryavāda,* which is the view that the causal substance transforms into a new form but the causal substance is unchanged.[59] While all manner of material forms are created from the causal substance the substance in never effected in anyway by its acts of creation. The key distinction here is that God does not exist as cause and the material world as effect. Rather the Supreme Person in His causal state creates the material realms, and in His effected state the universe is his embodiment. All

things in the material universe constitute the body of the Supreme Person, but the Supreme Person is much more than just these things. In this system finite selves undergo radical change as they are brought out of the undifferentiated state of darkness and into the ordered universe that is projected by the Supreme Person. In the effected state the Supreme Person is unchanged because the universe is the cosmic embodiment of the Him, and finite selves and non-intelligent substance are coeternal with Him.

While Rāmānuja is primarily concerned with hermeneutical synthesis, he is also participating in an ongoing debate of philosophical issues. This makes his writings as much dialogue as they are freestanding exegesis. In his commentary on *Śribhāṣya* 1.1.21 he provides what he determines to be the three textual categories for divine nature. First, the Supreme Person is the sole cause of the universe; this shows the importance Rāmānuja places on Brahman's role as material and efficient cause. Second, the Supreme Person's nature is true being, knowledge, infinitude and bliss. Purity (*amalatva*) is not explicitly included in this list, but it is understood as Rāmānuja has established purity as always being included in the first half of the Supreme Person's dual characteristics. Third, Rāmānuja begins by denying that the Supreme Person has any defiling qualities of the material realm, or that He is subject to *karma*, then he affirms that the Supreme Person possesses all auspicious qualities and an auspicious bodily form.[60]

Rāmānuja is continually responding to the Advaitan assertion that the Supreme Person as pure consciousness alone (*nirguṇa)* is superior to any discussion of the Him with qualities (*saguṇa).* This makes the final distinction drawn above important. According to the Advaitans attributes that do not support this abstraction of the Supreme Person are rejected as *neti neti,* not so or false. This is the call to which Rāmānuja replies:

> Just as we must acknowledge that the essential nature of Brahman is illumination [namely consciousness], so that such texts as "True being, knowledge, infinite is Brahman, " will not be deprived of their meaning; so likewise [we must admit that] Brahman certainly has the dual characteristic; otherwise the texts teaching the qualities of omniscience…etc. [which you just mentioned] and also freedom from such imperfections as ignorance, would lose their meaning.[61]

The point for Rāmānuja is that if you assert the infinite and self-conscious nature of Brahman based on scripture, you are justified. Numerous scriptural references that refer to Brahman as both an infinite being beyond all qualities and a self-conscious Personal Lord. If scripture is your source of truth, then asserting one truth necessitates the recognition of the truth of all other authoritative scriptures.[62]

The Supreme Person Ensouling the Cosmos and the Body Soul Relationship

Rāmānuja uses the relationship of substance–mode to explain the Śrivaiṣṇava understanding of the body-soul relationship between the Supreme Person and the cosmos.[63] Here the soul is that part of the finite person that rules over the body and is a part of the far more infinite Supreme Person. The tangible reality of the body/mode relationship is a causal formula in Rāmānuja's

writings. In this relationship the body is a mode of a self. "By virtue of being a body [in the instrumental case śarīratayā] this substance is a mode" or "By virtue of being a mode of a soul, a material body is a definite thing or substance [padārtha]." [64] This tangible reality only applies to a body/mode that is inhabited by a soul. Rāmānuja states,

> Bodies are altogether dependent on souls as their ontological ground, since they perish as soon as they are separated from a soul. Bodies exist only to enjoy the fruits of their respective karma. Bodies are modes of their respective souls, since they are attributes qualifying these souls.[65]

Rāmānuja sees in scripture a fundamental fact that finite selves are the body of the Supreme Person, and he argues logically from this fact that finite selves are consequently modes of the Supreme Person. Bodies are modes of the finite self, and finite selves are modes of the Supreme Person; conversely the Supreme Person is the substance of the finite self, which is the substance of the body.

In the introduction of the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja states clearly his metaphysical view on the relationship between the Supreme Person and the world.

> The finite self [jīvātmā] has Brahman as its Self, for it is His mode [prakāra] since it is the body [śarāra] of Brahman…All things having one of the varieties of characteristic physical structure, such as the divine form or the human form, are the modes of finite individual selves, since they are their respective bodies. This means that these physical objects, too, are ensouled by Brahman. Therefore all words naming these objects…first signify the objects they name in ordinary parlance, then, through these objects, the finite selves dwelling in them and finally these words extend in their significance to denote the Supreme Self [Paramātmā] who is their Inner Controller [antaryāmī]. Thus all terms do indeed denote this entire composite Being [sat] as its material cause, its

> instrumental cause, and its support [ādhāra]; it is controlled [niyāmya] by Being and is the śeṣa of Being.[66]

Above we are told clearly that finite selves are the mode of the Supreme Self, who is the master and creator. Finite selves are contained in Him and dependent on Him for their being. Rāmānuja has expanded the Śrivaiṣṇava relationship of body to soul to reveal his understanding of the relationship of substance to mode. In the substance-mode relationship a thing's status is wholly dependent on something more fundamental for its existence. Thus the status of the finite self as servant is dependent on the more fundamental Supreme Person.

In defining the essential nature of the Supreme Person and His material attributes, Rāmānuja achieved his goal of synthesis of the teachings of Vedānta with Śrīvaiṣṇava. *Paratva* and s*aulabhya* define attributes which govern the Supreme Person's inaccessibility and accessibility to finite souls. Carman sees these two categories as the keys to movement between the abstract Supreme Person and the Personal Lord. *Svarūpa* and *svabhāva* clarify the differences between those attributes that are the essence of the Supreme Person alone and those possessed by Him particularly when he assumes the form of Personal Lord. Again, Rāmānuja is illuminating and validating the Supreme Person as being both without qualities and with material qualities. In his understanding of the relation of substance to mode, Rāmānuja begins to explain the workings of the hierarchy between the Divine and the devotee. It is in the discussion of this hierarchy as

the relationship between the master and servant that the subtlety of the hierarchy is revealed

The Master and His Servant

The discussion of the *śeṣī* (master)/*śeṣa* (servant) relationship results from Rāmānuja's theological expositions on the nature of the finite human self (*jīvātmā)* and its relationship to the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*) or God. It is this relationship that Rāmānuja uses to reveal the dynamics between the Supreme Person and the finite person. This is also where he reveals the dissolution of hierarchy that appears to separate the Supreme Person from the finite person. We return again to the episode concerning the dictation of the *Śribhāṣya*. Rāmānuja had given his disciple Kūreśa permission to stop writing if he heard anything with which he could not agree. Rāmānuja defined the finite self as "*jñānaikasvarūpa* (whose essential nature is wholly consciousness or that which has cognition alone as its distinguishing attribute)."[67]

> Kūreśa ceased writing, for to him such a definition, though valid, was as good as no definition, inasmuch as the most essential characteristic of the soul, namely its *allegiance or liegeship to God, śeṣatva,* was a serious omission;…for no basis for true religion was raised by merely apprehending the soul as *that which is characterized by consciousness,* unless the soul is also the *sole property* or possession of the Universal soul, God.[68]

Upon seeing his disciple at full stop, Rāmānuja kicked Kūreśa and stormed off. After this less than sagacious display of ego, Rāmānuja is said to have realized the seriousness of his omission.

The second relational definition of the soul is never given in the *Śribhāṣya,* however this important concept of the finite self's relationship had been greatly emphasized in Rāmānuja's earlier work the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*. In both the *Śribhāṣya* and *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja is defined the terms *śeṣī* and *śeṣa* in response to the Prābhākara school of Karma Mīmāṃsa, which defined them in sacrificial terms as "principle purpose" and "accessory part" respectively. From the verbal root *śiṣ* (to leave, remaining), *śeṣa* derives its original meaning of remainder, and its later derivative meaning of that which is subordinate. In the sacrificial terms of Karma Mīmāṃsa, *śeṣa* becomes that which is intended to serve the principal purpose, the principle being the *śeṣī.*[69] For Rāmānuja, "śeṣa is that whose essential nature consists solely in being useful to something else by virtue of its intention to contribute some excellence to this other thing and this other [parah] is the śeṣī."[70]

The emphasis of Rāmānuja's summary of his theology in the *Vedārthasaṃgrah* is that the essential nature of the finite self is to be the *śeṣa* of the Lord. As discussed earlier, Rāmānuja is clear in the opening verse of the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* that the Supreme Person is the *śeṣī.* "Obeisance to Viṣṇu who is the Master and Owner of all beings, both material and spiritual, without exception."[71] Later in the text the *śeṣī/śeṣa* relationship is used to define the nature of the universe as well as the human/divine relationship. "This universe…has Being [sat] as its material cause, its instrumental cause, and its support [ādhāra]; it is controlled [niyāmya] by Being and is the śeṣa of Being".[72]

The Supreme Person is not only the *śeṣī* of the finite self but also of the entire cosmos.

In further exposition on the *śeṣa* Rāmānuja describes the subordination of the finite self.

> The supreme Brahman – who is a treasure store of countless superlatively [anavadhikātiśaya] auspicious qualities, is flawless, possesses the infinitely great realm manifesting His glory [anantamahāvibhūtī], and is an ocean of superlatively gracious condescension, beauty, and forgiving love – is the principal entity [śeṣī], and the self is the subordinate entity [śeṣa]. Therefore, when the Supreme Brahman is meditated upon as thus related [to the finite self], and when He is the object of superlative love [prītī], He causes the self to attain Him.[73]

His asserts the finite soul's *śeṣatva* (servitude) to the Supreme Person. In the finale clause he makes a point of upholding the doctrine of divine grace, which at this time is widely debated topic. Rāmānuja understands that the object for attainment is the Supreme Person, "who is Himself absolute and eternal bliss," and that the finite self with Him as its object is happy.[74] According to Rāmānuja the goal for the devotee is to be of service to the Supreme Person which leads to the experience of Divine grace and achievement of eternal bliss.

The strongest objection to this theology of superlative happiness in subordination is raised from the *Manusmṛti.* "All dependence on others [parāvaṣam] is unhappiness; all self dependence is happiness…Service is called a dog's life, so abandon it."[75] Rāmānuja argues that this desire for independence is a bodily one. According to Rāmānuja there are two misconceptions here, first that the finite self is the body and second that the finite self can be self-

dependent. "The proper nature of the soul, however, is solely of the form of consciousness, a form that is quite distinct from all the different kinds of bodies, and its own proper or essential nature is also to be a subordinate entity to some other being."[76] Once again Rāmānuja has reconciled the abstract with the relational, the finite self is pure consciousness whose happiness is as the subordinate in a relationship. The soul is not to be misidentified with the body and therefore its subordination is not to be to anyone or anything of a material nature, but only to the Supreme Person. "Only the Supreme Person is worthy to be served by all who know the true nature of the self."[77] The contradiction is resolved and the Manusmṛti is now clear, service to anyone other than the Supreme Person is a dog's life and must be abandoned.

Implications of Rāmānuja's Theology

Rāmānuja's goal is to reconcile the concepts of non-dualist union in an abstract Supreme Person with those of Śrivaiṣṇava devotion to a Personal Lord, and he sees the simultaneous unity and distinction between the Supreme Person and finite person as a self-evident truth. Debates over the nature of the Supreme Person and His unity with the devotee on the one hand and His necessary separateness on the other, were a constant among the philosopher/theologians of Rāmānuja's day. The absolute unity of non-dualism requires that the Supreme Person and the devotee are one and the same, while relational distinction requires a point of separation between the Supreme Person and the devotee. There are interesting implications from Rāmānuja's assertion that

principles of both unity and distinction are true. Rāmānuja defines the relationship between the Supreme Person and the devotee as a hierarchy of a master over a servant. As a result one would expect the ultimate goal of such a relationship to be a communion between the Supreme Person and the devotee that maintains hierarchy. But, because Rāmānuja is reconciling the various teachings on union in the abstract Supreme Person with devotional relationship, union with and not communion with the Supreme Person is the final goal. Therefore in the devotional relationship there must be a point where there is dissolution of the hierarchy between the divine and the devotee for the gap of distinction to be crossed and union to occur.

There are places in the *Gītābhāṣya* where Rāmānuja supports the concepts of hierarchy between the Supreme Person and the devotee. *Bhagavadgītā* 9.4-5 reads, "This entire universe is pervaded by Me, in an unmanifest form. All beings abide in Me, but I do not abide in them."[78] Rāmānuja paraphrases this to mean:

> My existence (*sthiti*) is not under their control, which means that they are not helping in any way in My existence … I am the supporter of all beings; they are no help at all to me at any time …[79]

However in the introduction to this commentary Rāmānuja reveals that the Supreme Person, while in some ways distinct from the devotee, does not exist as an absolute or exclusive master/superior. In Rāmānuja's understanding the Supreme Person is intimately involved with the devotee:

> He, the Lord … who had taken upon Himself a mortal human form for helping the world, overwhelmed by His love for those devotees who have taken refuge in Him –That Supreme Person made Arjuna the master and himself the charioteer, so that he could be seen by all people.[80]

To be "overwhelmed with love" implies vulnerability on the part of the Supreme Person, not a dangerous weakness but a point of receptivity. This vulnerability and receptivity allow for the possibility of mutual exchange between the Supreme Person and the finite. For the exchange to be truly mutual the two parties must, at least for a moment, be acting as equals. However there is something more expressed here. The Supreme Person does not assume the role of lord over the devotee, but places Himself in the position of charioteer in service to Arjuna. I argue that this role reversal is the beginning of the dissolution of the cosmic hierarchy, which is necessary for the simultaneous functioning of the Supreme Person as abstract unity and material Personal Lord. This mutuality in the relationship is later asserted in a comment from *Gītā bhāṣya* 7.18.

> 'I consider that the wise person [*jñānī*] is My very self [ātmā].' This means that the support for My existence is under his control. Why so ? Because the wise person finds it impossible without Me to sustain His self. He takes Me alone as his superlative goal. Therefore without him, I cannot sustain My self. Thus he is indeed My self. [81]

This assertion seems surprising when in his earlier work, the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja expounded on the hierarchy of the relationship between the master and the servant with such vehemence.

In his comments on *Gītābhāṣya* 9.29, Rāmānuja takes another step. Here he asserts not only a mutual relationship between the Supreme Person and the

devotee but one where the hierarchy he asserted in the master servant relationship is reversed. In the comment on *Bhagavadgītā* 9.29 Rāmānuja states,

> Those who worship me out of intense love because they cannot sustain their souls without worshiping Me exist within My very self provided with every happiness as though their qualities were equal to mine. "I, too, am in them" means I treat them *as If* (*iva*) they were my superiors.[82]

Rāmānuja uses "as if" to soften the blow of his radical assertion that there is a point in the devotional relationship where the hierarchy of the master/servant is reversed and the devotee becomes the superior. The implication of this reversal is made clear by later followers of Rāmānuja, who abandon the soft "as if" assertion of their teacher, and instead go so far as to say directly that the Supreme Person is dependent on His dependents.[83]

For the introduction of the *Vedārthasaṃgraha,* Rāmānuja chose an image of Viṣṇu that illuminates his understanding of the relationship between the Divine and the devotee, and one that fully expresses the paradox of mutual dependence between the two. The image is of the serpent Ādiśeṣa supporting Viṣṇu while He is in a state of vulnerable and complete repose. Viṣṇu lays sleeping in the coil of the primordial servant and the multiple heads of the serpent rise above Viṣṇu's sleeping body. It is an image where the hierarchy is reversed and the relationship is clearly one of mutual dependence. Ādiśeṣa may not exist without Viṣṇu, but it is apparent that Viṣṇu is dependent on his service when He surrenders His support to him while He is in the state of complete repose. I argue that based on his choice to use this image Rāmānuja would be

comfortable with his followers' expansion of his writing. Clearly he sees that the hierarchy of the master/servant is ultimately dissolved and the relationship between the two parties is no longer one of hierarchy but one of mutual dependence.

In the introduction of the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja describes this well known image of Viṣṇu.

> *śeṣa cidacidvastuśeiṣine śeṣaśayine*
> *nirmalānanta kalyāṇanidhaye viṣnave namah*[84]
>
> Obeisance to Viṣṇu repository of endless and untainted auspicious things
> Lying on Ādiṣesa one who is the master of all servants who are conscious
> and unconscious things[85]

This image is described in the opening of a work focused on the *śeṣī/śeṣa* relationship. Saṇskrit verse is focused on sound as well as grammar. In the first line our attention is drawn to the topic the master/servant relationship by the repetition of the words *śeṣī* or *śeṣa* three times. Beginning with the end of the first line and working forward we have mentioned Ādiśeṣa the primordial serpent and servant, who is the chief *śeṣī* (master) of all *śeṣa* (servants). There is a pun here: Viṣṇu/the Supreme Person sleeps in yogic trance in complete surrender and supported by the primordial serpent Ādiśeṣa who is the master of all servants. This pun is that Viṣṇu at this moment cannot support Himself and is dependent on the ultimate servant, who is both below and above Him. This pun is probably intended. As stated earlier, *śeṣa* is defined in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*: "that whose essential nature is just to be useful to something else by intending

to contribute some excellence to that other superior reality, the *śeṣī*."[86] The service this chief *śeṣa* provides is not passive service but an active contribution to the relationship. The dynamic is one where the master is dependent on the servant. This choice of imagery for the opening of a work focused on the *śeṣī/śeṣa* tells us that Rāmānuja was aware of the paradox in his theology. Union in the devotional relationship is made possible because the distinction between the two parties is bridged when the hierarchy of master/servant is reversible and a mutually dependence between them is revealed. Because of mutual dependence this unity is not that of unity beyond distinction but one of a unity within relationship. Here the boundary that hierarchy creates is bridged and both parties are allowed to function in either role. This role reversal allows for the dissolution of hierarchy that is necessary for union within the devotional relationship.

Mutual dependence is necessary for synthesis of the union prescribed in non-dualist Vedānta and the union achieved through devotion. To allow the devotee to become ultimately united with that to which it has heretofore been distinct, requires that the boundary between the two somehow be dissolved. Because the devotional relationship requires some distinction, the boundary between the two parties cannot simply disappear completely into the unity of non-dualism. Thus to maintain the distinction and allow for union the boundaries must become fluid in such a way as to allow for each party to at any time belong to either category: master or servant, Supreme or finite, lover or

beloved, divine or devotee. This is what allows the hierarchy that has separated the divine and the devotee to be dissolved.

If there are still categories to which one belongs then how does the relationship of mutual dependence differ from one of simple communion? The ultimate goal for communion in the devotional Hindu context is for the finite person to be united with the Supreme Person, for their relationship to be fully consummated. Reversal of hierarchy is crucial because it allows the devotee to move into the category of superior/master and the divine to assume the position of subordinate/servant. When the categories for the divine and devotee are interchangeable then hierarchy no longer keeps the two parties separate from one another. When the categories and roles in the relationship are not exclusive, there is mutual exchange among equals, not simple communion between higher and lower.

Why does Rāmānuja choose to assert mutual dependence over absorption in abstract unity beyond distinction? It appears that a move to dissolve hierarchy into absorption in unity would be the most simple and direct means to reconcile the non-dualism of Advaita with the devotionalism of Śrivaiṣṇava. This is the logic that Advaitans use to resolve the conflict between the two schools of thought and which allows them to assert the ultimate superiority of their view while accepting the view of Śrivaiṣṇava. The Advaitans allow that ultimate union can be achieved via the practice of devotion to a personal lord. However, when union is achieved they argue that there is a realization that the distinction

between the devotee and the lord never actually existed. Therefore, they argue that the path of Advaita is ultimately superior path to that of devotion. Rāmānuja set out to prove the validity of all the teachings of Vedānta, which assert the truth that the Supreme Person is both the substance of all reality and a material Personal Lord. For him abandoning the concept of Personal Lord, as the Advaitans do in their final assertion, ultimately denies the validity of devotion to a Personal Lord. Rāmānuja reveals a reversal of hierarchy, which allows for mutual dependence between the participants in the relationship. The divine and the devotee thus exist not as separate entities but parts of the same whole. Mutual dependence between the Supreme Person and the devotee bridges the gap between non-dualistic Advaita and the devotion of Śrīvaiṣṇava.

Conclusion

I argue that the dissolution of the cosmic hierarchy necessary for union within devotion is accompanied by a reversal of roles, which allows the master to become the servant. Carman sees this as "an incredible mutuality, with some hints of mysterious intimacy."[87] This idea of role reversal is well supported in the use of the Saṇskrit literary motif of the lovers' quarrel to represent the relationship between the divine and the devotee. Carman sees in the lovers quarrel the revelation of the "mysterious intimacy", between the divine and the devotee. In the middle of the twelfth century CE, shortly after Rāmānuja's writing, the poet Jayadeva composed the *Gītagovinda* (Love Song of the Dark Lord). According to tradition Jayadeva is said to have been initiated into the

Śrīvaiṣṇava cult in Puri, which was begun when Rāmānuja established a school there in the early part of the twelfth century.[88] This lyrical poem is a representation of the divine/devotee relationship set in the motif of the lover's quarrel between Lord Kṛṣṇa and the cowherdess Rādhā. It is one of the most well known examples of erotic mood used to express religious experience, of esthetic experience as spiritual metaphor. Early in the first song the sacred intent of this poem is declared when the ordinary hierarchical catagories are breached.

> Jayadeva, wandering king of bards
> Who sing at Padmāvatī's lotus feet,
> Was obsessed in his heart
> By the rhythms of the goddess of speech,
> And he made this lyrical poem
> From tales of the passionate play
> When Krishna loved Śrī.[89]

The love interest Rādhā is referred to throughout the poem as Śrī, Padmāvatī, Kamalā, Padmā and Lakṣmī, all names for Viṣṇu's divine consort.[90] By attributing such divine names to Rādhā her status is elevated to that of a divine being one equal to Kṛṣṇa. This change of Rādhā's status is a first step toward reversal and dissolution of hierarchy. The shift from erotic entertainment to sacred metaphor is further indicated by Jayadeva's invocation of this Kṛṣṇa as one of ten incarnations of Viṣṇu in the first song. After individual verses that clearly name the ten incarnations and relate Kṛṣṇa to them, the accomplishments of these ten incarnations are summarized.

> For upholding the Vedas,

For supporting the earth,
For raising the world,
For tearing the demon asunder,
For cheating Bali,
For destroying the warrior class,
For conquering Rāvaṇa,
For wielding the plow,
For spreading compassion,
For routing the barbarians,
Homage to you, Krishna,
In your ten incarnate forms![91]

If in the course of this passionate drama the true intent of the poet is lost there is another reminder in the signature verse from the finale song.

Make your heart sympathetic to Jayadeva's splendid speech!
Recalling Hari's feet is elixir against fevers of this dark time.
She told the joyful Yadu hero, playing to delight her heart.[92]

This poem is clearly not meant as a simple erotic entertainment but is a passionate expression of the divine love in devotion.

Unlike many sacred/erotic metaphors this tale ends with full consummation of the relationship. What is most striking in this tale of the foils and fortune of erotic love is not the requisite leveling of the hierarchy between the Divine and the devotee, which is required for actual union to be achieved, but the reversal of this hierarchy. In the final song after the two lovers have resolved their quarrel and consummated their love in the trysting place, the reversal is made explicit.

Displaying her passion
In loveplay as the battle began,
She launched a bold offensive
Above him
And triumphed over her lover…

> Then, as he idled after passionate love,
> Rādhā, wanting him to ornament her,
> *Freely told her lover,*
> *Secure in her power over him*. [93] emphasis mine

The devotee who was elevated to a level equal to the Divine has now been taken another step and she is placed above Him. The mystery in the intimacy is that the cosmic hierarchy is not simply bridged but that is reversed. The devotee no longer requests, but *tells* her lover her desires and they are granted. The verse closes, "Her yellow robed-lover, Did what Rādhā said."[94] Miller aptly expresses the religious objective of Jayadeva.

> For Jayadeva their longing and reunion is the concrete example of religious experience in which the disquieting distinction between "I" and "mine" versus "you" and "yours" is calmed. The esthetic experience of their love is the means for breaking the imaginary barrier dividing human from divine.[95]

Jayadeva takes to logical conclusion the reversal of hierarchy that Rāmānuja introduced in his theology of mutual dependence between the master and servant. What is implied is that in union with the Divine the devotee is empowered with the same authority as the Divine, the devotee commands and it is done. This is a clear depiction of the master becoming the servant. A concept no less radical to modern ears than it was to Jayadeva's audience, for whom the characters were the Supreme Person and the finite soul. Sanskrit poetry was meant to allow the hearer to experience first hand the emotion of the characters and Jayadeva skillfully takes the listener to the place of union with the Divine

and ultimate realization of the Divinity that all devotees posses. Union is achieved in the moment where the master becomes the servant. While Rāmānuja did not take his theology out to its fullest conclusion, later thinkers and writers did. Rāmānuja recognized the reversal and dissolution of hierarchy that followed from his theology. In Jayadeva's poem we see the reversal and dissolution of the cosmic hierarchy both literally and metaphorically.

What relevance does the eleven hundred year old theology of Rāmānuja have for contemporary thinkers? The paradox of mutual dependence that he reveals and never directly resolves could be the fatal logical flaw which causes his thinking to be rejected altogether. I think it is precisely that he takes his theology to the point of reversal and dissolution of hierarchy and stops that allows his theology to continue to stimulate contemporary thinkers. Possibly the implications of the reversal and dissolution of cosmic hierarchy and the revelation of mutual dependence in the devotional relationship are great not only for theologians of South Asia, but also for those in monotheistic traditions. In monotheistic traditions communion is often perceived as the only possible goal, the distinction between the Divine and the devotee an absolute. Yet within the mystical traditions of the monotheistic traditions similar problems of paradox have been observed. The Sufi mystic Rumi clearly transcends any boundary between the Divine and himself.

> Glorious is the moment we sit in the palace, you and I
> Two forms, two faces, but a single soul, you and I [96]

The Christian mystic Teresa of Avila also moves beyond any concept of the Divine and the devotee being ultimately separate and distinct from one another.

> Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
> no hands but yours,
> no feet but yours
> Yours are the eyes through which is to look out
> Christ's compassion to the world [97]

What appears from a monotheistic perspective to be a closed case for communion between distinct parties is not so tightly closed according to the mystics from those traditions. The theology of Rāmānuja provides a strong foundation for those who study comparative religion and mysticism to delve more deeply into nature of humanity and divinity via their relationship.

Notes

[1] John Braisted Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (London: Yale University Press, 1974); reprint (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1981), 49. All translations Carman's unless otherwise noted.
[2] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 61.
[3] Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pblishers,1975), 100.
[4] Ian Kesarcodi-Watson,"Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," in G. M. Bailey and Ian Kesarcodi-Watson, eds., *Bhakti Studies* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1992), 121.
[5] This is a fairly reliable date, quoted in many sources with little comment or explanation.
[6] Mariasusai Dhavomony, "Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja as Hindu Reformer," *Studia Missionali,* 34 (1995): 131.
[7] Kesarcodi-Watson, "Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 121.
[8] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 131
[9] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 101.
[10] Kesarcodi-Watson,"Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 124.
[11] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 63, 68.
[12] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 64.
[13] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 66, 69.
[14] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 97-8.
[15] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 95.
[16] J. S. M. Hooper, trans. quoted in Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 75.
[17] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 79. Individual translator not identified.
[18] Kesarcodi-Watson, "Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 118.
[19] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 100-02.
[20] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume III,* 101.
[21] Dhavomony, "Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja as Hindu Reformer," 134.
[22] Kesarcodi-Watson, "Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 122.
[23] Kesarcodi-Watson, "Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 122.
[24] Dhavomony, "Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja as Hindu Reformer," 133-34.
[25] Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition, Volume 1 From the Beginning to 1800, second edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 188), 384.
[26] Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition, Volume 1 From the Beginning to 1800,* 383.
[27] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 95-6.
[28] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 96.
[29] J. A. B van Buitenen, trans.; the last sentence following M. R. Rajagopala Ayyangar, Vedarth Sangraha, p. 51 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 124.
[30] Van Buitenen trans.; Thibaut, trans., p3 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 64.
[31] Lacombe, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 64-5.
[32] Van Buitenen, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 70.
[33] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 79.
[34] Annangarācārya, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 77.
[35] Annangarācārya, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 78.
[36] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 80.
[37] Annangarācārya, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 78.
[38] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 78.
[39] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 81.
[40] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 84.
[41] Annangarācārya, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 84.
[42] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 85.

[43] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 87.
[44] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 92.
[45] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, *91.*
[46]; Thibaut, trans., p 638 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 88.
[47] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 93.
[48] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 90.
[49] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 94-5.
[50] Annangarācārya, trans. quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 77.
[51] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 97.
[52] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 97.
[53] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 98.
[54] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 109.
[55] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 105.
[56] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 116-17.
[57] Annangarācārya, trans.; Thibaut trans. p 226; Rangacharya, trans. pp336-37 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 116.
[58] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 116.
[59] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 115.
[60] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 114.
[61] Annangarācārya, trans. p 309; Thibaut, trans. pp611-12 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 114-15.
[62] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 115.
[63] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 125.
[64] Lacombe, trans. p 114; Thibaut, trans. p 135; Rangacharya, trans. p 195 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 125.
[65]Lacombe, trans. p114-15; Thibaut, trans. pp 136-137; Rangacharya, trans. p 197 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 126.
[66] Van Buitenen, trans.; last sentence following J. R. Rajagopala Ayyangar, *Vedartha Sangraha*, p51 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 124.
[67] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 95-6.
[68] Annangarācārya, trans. p 308; Thibaut, trans. pp 173; Rangacharya, trans. pp 251-252 quoted in Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 96.
[69] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 147.
[70] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 148.
[71] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 151.
[72] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 151.
[73] Carman, *Theology of Rama*nuja, 152.
[74] Carman, *Theology of Rama*nuja, 152.
[75] John Braisted Carman, "The Dignity and Indignity of Service: The Role of the Self in Hindu Bhakti," in Leroy S. Rouner, ed. *Selves, People and Persons: What Does It Mean to be a Self?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 109. Carman revisited his understanding of the relationship between the Supreme Person and the finite person many years after his original dissertation on Rāmānuja.109.
[76] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 153.
[77] Carman, "The Dignity and Indignity of Service," 110.
[78] Swami Adidavananda, *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya* (Mylapore, Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math)*,* 296. There are no printing dates listed in this text.
[79] Kesarcodi-Watson, "Śaṇkara, Rāmānuja and Bhakti," 114.
[80] Swami Adidavanands, *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya,* 44.
[81] Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 211.
[82] Carman, "The Dignity and Indignity of Service," 115 (emphasis mine)

[83] Carman, "The Dignity and Indignity of Service," 115.
[84] Carman, "The Dignity and Indignity of Service," 116.
[85] Translation mine.
[86] Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja,* 147.
[87] John Braisted Carman, "Hindu Bhakti as a Middle Way," in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Other side of God: A Polarity in World Religions* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1981), 194.
[88] Barbara Stoller Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva Love Song of the Dark Lord* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); reprint (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 5.
[89] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva*, 69.
[90] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 26.
[91] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 71.
[92] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 125.
[93] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 123-24.
[94] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 125.
[95] Miller, *The Gītagovinda of Jayadeva,* 15.
[96] Andrew Harvey, *The Essential Mystics: the Soul's Journey into Truth,* (New York: Haprer Collins Publishers, 1996), 163.
[97] Harvey, *The Essential Mystics,* 206.

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