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Steering the Head and the Heart

Expressions of devotion and forms of bhakti in Çrëvairiëava and Caitanya Vairiëava traditions

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" The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect, between life and death. When literature becomes too intellectual — when it begins to ignore the passions, the emotions — it becomes sterile, silly, and actually without substance".

— Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991), the Nobel Prize in Literature 1978.

1. Introduction

Which should you trust more — your head or your heart? This question was raised at the 2007 Great American Think-Off, a national philosophy contest that gives common people the chance to debate over some of life's more perplexing questions. The live audience in New York Mills selected as a winner an arts' administrator from Minneapolis, Joe Kaiser, who argued that in making decisions, one should trust the heart more than the head. On the one hand, heart's decisions come from our experience, intuitive feelings, and instinctive knowing without the use of rational processes. A decision that comes from the head, on the other hand, involves analytical thinking and methodical examination of things. Do these two modes of decision making automatically exclude each other? Furthermore, if we would apply these two outlooks to the religious life, then in meeting with God, what should be the prevailing attitude? Interestingly enough, the second place at the debate went to the 'head', a position defended by Paul D. Allick, an Episcopal priest (Locke, 2007, [online]).

In Indian religious tradition, devotion or *bhakti-yoga* is often connected with intense emotion toward the deity. Among the three ways to salvation, the course of proper action (*karma-yogā*) and the path of knowledge (*jī'āna-yogā*), *bhakti* is the one that comes from the

heart. Whereas *karma-yoga* prescribes complicated ritualistic performances, and *jī'āna-yoga* requires rigorous spiritual discipline, by the path of loving devotion (*bhakti-yoga*), so the *bhakti* scriptures say, a person very easily achieves the desired goal — liberation from material existence.

In this essay, I examine the similarities and differences between forms of *bhakti* in the Ṣrēvaiṇēava tradition of Rāmānuja and the Ālvārs, and the Caitanya Vaiṇēava tradition. Rāmānuja did not try to defend the emotional *bhakti* of the Ālvārs, and was more concerned with the Vedānta philosophy, *Bhagavad-gētā*, and the earlier *Pai'carātra* tradition. On the one hand, in an apologetic way toward the acceptance of the older and generally more acceptable *bhakti*, he went for the 'head'. On the other hand, drawing mainly from the *Bhāgavata Purāēa*, Caitanya Vaiṇēava tradition treats emotions very systematically accentuating thus more the 'heart'. In my essay, I suggest that one can steer the head and the heart as one, with cooperation and in contact with each other. Whereas Rāmānuja purposefully veils his emotionalism, the Caitanya Vaiṇēava tradition couches its theology of *bhakti-rasa* and emotional *bhakti* in carefully formulated philosophical and theological system.

To establish themselves in the somewhat inflexible Hindu social milieu, in both of the traditions, Sanskrit language was used to ascertain the authority of their teachings. In the case of the Caitanya Vaiṇēava tradition, the important concern was also the validity of *sampradāya* of Caitanya, or his disciplic lineage. As much as it was possible for me, I relied on the primary sources, such as Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Bhagavad-gētā* or the *Bhakti-rasāmāta-sindhu* by Rūpa Gosvāmē. Additionally, I also use the wide variety of

secondary sources and works by scholars and specialists in the Çrévaiñëava and Caitanya Vaiñëava traditions.

2. Dual tradition

The Vedānta acknowledges both the unity of all reality in the ultimate principle called Brahman and great diversity and distinctiveness associated with the experience of each individual. Pain and pleasure or heat and cold are not universally existent everywhere under all conditions equitably for everybody, but each person senses these dualities differently. Yet, the Vedānta claims, there is Brahman – the actual substance of the world, or that from which the world arises, that by which it is supported, and that into which it returns.¹ As one may anticipate, a question arose among the Vedāntists on how to understand this apparent contrast between Brahman and the world, the dichotomy of the one and the many. Some commentators emphasized unity and the view of reality as a unified whole, while others focused on diversity, viewing the universe as consisting of three separate and enduring principles — Brahman, the living entity, and inert material nature.

The view most well known in the West and the prevailing approach of the many neo-Vedāntists was that of the eighth-century South-Indian philosopher Çai kara (788-820 CE).² He favored the idea of non-duality (*advaita*) that denies the absolute difference between Brahman and the world. On the relative plane, the world as it appears to us, there is a

¹ *sarvam khalv idaà brahma, tajjalān it, çānta upāsēta . . . Chāndoghya Upaniṣad (3.14)*

² Here I primarily refer to the interpretation of *advaita-vedānta* given by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950).

difference between the world and how it appears to us, he says. However, once one attains true knowledge of the eternal and non-dual self (being essentially non-different from Brahman) and when the falsity of this world is recognized, pains and pleasures of this world no longer affect him or her. "Our ignorance, it seems", Ward (1998, 11) explains, "is to live in a world of dreams, and to take dream for reality; whereas the true reality is a changeless substratum of pure intelligence, limitless and free". As long as one takes the world as real and individuality as a factual quality, devotion to God, personal and glorious maker of the phenomenal world, is merely a stepping stone to a knowledge of a formless God, "which comes only when all desires, even the desire for heaven in the presence of God, have ended" (Ward, 1998, 17). Çai kara may have re-established the authority of the Vedic scriptures and successfully defended traditional Hindu system of temple worship against the Buddhists, Jains, and other heterodox Hindu sects, yet Carman (1994, 81) notes that Çai kara's "interpretation of the Vedānta seemed to some to undermine subtly the basis of their devotion". If the personal God, as well as the individuality of the living entities, exists only on a lesser level of existence, then of what value would devotion to such God be?

Three hundred years later, however, in Rāmānuja's (1017–1137 CE) devotional exposition on Vedānta called *Çrī-bhāṣya* God is beginning to argue back. Unlike Çai kara before him, Rāmānuja does not differentiate between reality and appearance. Rather, he recognizes distinctions within one basic reality (*viçivādvaitā*), and privileges every individual with personality as a persisting quality. Take for example the body, he suggests, that is owned and controlled by the soul, so is the universe as a whole, together with all that live in it, the body of God. Of course, as Ward (1998, 31) points out, "to speak of the world

as the body of God is a metaphor and it must not be thought that Rāmānuja means that the universe has feet, hands, brain, sense-organs and so forth". He only wants to emphasize that God is greatest in status, authority and power (*ceñīñ*), a merciful father of every living entity (*ceñās*) that eternally depend on Him. While Çai kara advocates meditative knowledge (*upāsana*) as a direct method (*upāya*) to achieve liberation and devotion (*bhakti*) to God serves as means to that end, for Rāmānuja devotion becomes the way and the goal, "for *bhakti* has the same meaning as *upāsana*".

In the *laghu-siddhānta* of the *Çre-bhāñya*, he elucidates on this notion of meditation (*dhyāna*). He states that meditation really means a steady and continuous remembrance (*dhruvānusmāñ*), uninterrupted like the flow of oil. This meditation has the character of "seeing," or "intuition." The remembrance is really like a continuous vision (*smāñ-darçana-rūpa*), and there is a sense of direct perception or "immediate presentation" (*sākiñt-kāra*). The person who has this remembrance is chosen or favored by the Lord ("highest Self"), and by him the highest Self is gained. Steady remembrance of this kind is designated by the word *bhakti* (devotion), and this word has the same meaning as *upāsana* (Narayanan, 1987, 80)

Rāmānuja is primarily concerned with Vedānta and writes only in Sanskrit, the *lingua franca* of learned South Asia at the time. While arguing for the personality of Supreme Brahman and promoting *bhakti* as a direct way of realizing it, he draws predominantly from *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Upaniñads*. However, the idea of ultimate reality as the Supreme Personal Being, endowed with infinite auspicious attributes *par excellence*, precedes him in the devotional outpourings of the twelve Vaiññava saints born between the seventh and tenth-centuries CE — the Ālvārs.

According to the tradition, Tamil songs of the Ālvārs integrate the popular religion of the Epics and the *Vaiññava Purāñeas* with Rāmānuja's interpretation of Vedānta and

Vaiñëava ritualism enunciated in the *Pai'carätra* literature. "The most striking feature of reality as portrayed by the Älvärs," Chari (1997, 39) tells us, "is that the Supreme Being of Vedänta is personal God in name of Näräyaëa who possesses not only auspicious attributes but also a spiritual body bedecked with weapons and ornaments". The Älvärs talk about the extraordinary nature of God, as well as the love that arises as they undergo an emotional sensation from being together with the Lord of their hearts.

Who is he, possessing the highest good?
Who is he, graciously bestowing wisdom and love?
Who is he, the commander of the never-tiring Immortals?
O my mind!
Worship his radiant feet,
Which destroy all sorrow, and rise.

Beyond the reach of the inner mind, freed of filth,
Full blown and rising upward
Beyond the grasp of sense organs,
He is pure bliss. Know him!
There is none like him
in the past present and future.
He is my life!
There is none higher than him.
(Narayanan, 1987, 180-181)

Whereas some schools of thought tend to be unilateral and emphasize one theological aspect, in their hymns of devotion the Älvärs talk about various aspects of divinity. For example, the *Pai'carätra* literature deals more with theology and various modes of worship, especially elaborating on the methods of approaching God enshrined in the temple. Focusing on the essential nature of the Supreme Being and the *Weltanschauung* of those that seek liberation from birth and death, the *Upaniñads*, on the other hand, stress more the esoteric aspect of religion. Salvific acts of Viñëu, depicted in the mythology of the *Puräëas*

and the Epics, highlight the divine attributes and divine functions. As noted by Chari (1997, 70), the poetry of the Ālvārs encompasses all these aspects of divinity.

God still has the highest rank, level, and importance, but the Ālvārs also remove Him from His pedestal of majesty. The omniscient originator and ruler of the universe thus becomes a butter thief Kāñēa to which “Kulaçekara Ālvār, Periyālvār, and Tirumaī kai Ālvār sing lullabies” (Narayanan, 1987, 31). Yet, in their prayers, the Ālvārs also address the Lord in the temple and experience a mystical communion with Him within the heart. The uniqueness of the *Dīvyaprabhandham*, anthology of Ālvār poetry, lies in presenting God in all of His seemingly contrasting attributes like the heavenly splendor (*aīçvarya*) and universal accessibility (*saulabhya*), which have the capacity to attract intense interest and evoke deeply emotional response from His devotees. “In varying degrees,” writes Nayanar (1993, 55), “the Ālvārs were participants in the emotional form of *bhakti*, based on experience of God’s grace and involving a radical surrender to Him”. Such devotion is called *prapatti*, or absolute self-surrender to the Lord. Since there is an agreement about the goal (Nārāyaēa) and the means (*bhakti*) to achieve it, the Çrévaiñēavas thus accept the Tamil songs of the Ālvārs on the same level as the Sanskrit Vedānta, and often refer to their tradition as *Ubhaya-vedānta*, or the dual Vedānta.

However, poetry is the language of the heart, while philosophy deals with the rational side of human nature, interrelating and assessing arguments according to strict principles of validity. Thus, when they talk about *bhakti* do they really mean the same? Does Rāmānuja’s formal systematization of devotion, called *bhakti-yoga*, correspond to the highly emotional *bhakti* depicted in the Ālvār poetry?

In his study of the Ālvār tradition, *Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Ālvārs*,

Chari (1997, 130) remarks:

On careful study of the Ālvār's hymns against the background of the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* and also the *Bhagavad-gītā* on *sādhanā*, as interpreted by Rāmānuja, we can notice the difference between the two. The *bhakti-yoga* is a rigorous religio-spiritual discipline (*sādhanā*) to be practiced for the lifetime until *mokṣa* is attained along with the prescribed *karma-yoga* and *jīāna-yoga* including the scrupulous observance of *varēācrama-dharma*.

Furthermore, Hardy (2001, 46) views Rāmānuja's conception of *bhakti-yoga* as a betrayal of the earlier emotional *bhakti* of the Ālvārs. Emotional *bhakti* for Hardy represents a neglected phenomenon and Rāmānuja's normative theology, an intellectual approach to devotional life, "eliminates most elements of emotionalism from its Ālvār heritage, so that there was no occasion to grasp it conceptually: *bhakti* is the *yoga* of the *Gītā*". Hardy (2001, 480) goes further to say that "it is precisely emotional *bhakti* which faded out of the awareness of later Ṇrēvaiṇēavism; behind the facade of the *Ubhaya-vedānta*, the pressure of normative ideology to remove what its anti-emotional premises could not tolerate as second norm and thus as challenge—emotionalism".

Dualism naturally denotes something that consists of two parts or elements. In the case of *Ubhaya-vedānta* those two elements, the Ālvārs' emotionalism and Rāmānuja's normative theology may not be in perfect unison. However, even if they are not in ideal congruity with one another, as Chari observes, one still cannot view Rāmānuja's approach to *bhakti-yoga* as a misrepresentation intended to conceal the Ālvārs' devotional religion that swept away South India three centuries earlier, as Hardy suggests. There is a difference, but also plausible reasons in favor of synthesis between the emotional and intellectual

strands of *Ubhaya-vedānta*. To highlight the difference, in the following section I focus on Rāmānuja's view of *bhaktī-yoga*. After presenting Rāmānuja's understanding of *bhaktī-yoga* as a spiritual discipline, in the next chapter I contend why one ought to look upon the Çrēvaiñēava tradition as a coherent whole, despite the differences between the Tamil and Sanskrit strands.

3. Rāmānuja on Yoga

In his larger writings, Rāmānuja portrays *bhaktī-yoga* as a strict discipline where a devotee struggles to obtain remembrance and steady vision of the Lord. *Çrē-bhāñya* and *Gētā-bhāñya*, Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Bhagavad-gētā*, describe *bhaktī-yoga* as a practice attainable by a synthesis of *karma-yoga*, *jī-āna-yoga*, and *dhyāna-yoga*. Apparently, for Rāmānuja *bhaktī-yoga*, the only way to liberation, turns out to be a privilege for the upper echelon of Hindu society, the higher three classes. Eligibility for *bhaktī-yoga* does not depend on desire, or mere wish to practice it, but on birth in the 'right' caste, which is generally hereditary with very small chance for upward mobility.

It is impossible that the capability of performing meditations on Brahman should belong to a person not knowing the nature of Brahman and the due modes of meditation, and not qualified by the knowledge of the requisite preliminaries of such meditation, viz. recitation of the Veda, sacrifices, and so on. Mere want or desire does not impart qualification to a person destitute of the required capability. And this absence of capability is due, in the *çūdra* case, to absence of legitimate study of the Veda. (Rāmānuja, 1904, 338, [Online])

By acquisition of right knowledge from scripture, under the guidance of an accomplished teacher (*guru*), one also develops qualities like peacefulness (*çamai*), self-control (*damai*), and the ability to tolerate unfavorable circumstances (*tapai*). These

contribute to the fulfillment of proper performance of *karma*, or action. With *karma*, Rāmānuja does not mean any kind of action, but work performed as a worship of the Supreme. As explained by Lester (1976, 46), the action by itself is not intrinsically contaminating; rather, it is the selfish desire to enjoy the fruit of one's action that binds the living entity to this transitory world. Thus, the Lord does not advise sensation of action and renouncement of worldly activity. Rather, He recommends action performed in a renounced mood, dutiful work without attachment to the results — *karma-yoga*. This destroys sins and brings about peace of mind. In the purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* (12.12)

Rāmānuja explains:

The peace of mind from the destruction of sins will come only after the performance of works without desire for fruits. When mind is tranquil, meditation on the self is accomplished. From meditation arises knowledge of that (self) in direct realization. From that knowledge in direct realization arises supreme devotion. (Rāmānuja, 2002, 346-347)

In this way, Rāmānuja links routine work with the acts of devotion describing it as an indispensable means of progress and advancement to *bhakti*.

The social aspect thus enters into the devotional sphere and those desirous of release should perform their duties according to one's social status (*varēa*) and stage in life (*ācramā*) until the death of this present body. Why is it so? "Because sacrifices, giving of gifts, austerities and the like," Rāmānuja (2002, 478-479) writes, "are the means for purification for the wise, therefore it is My [Kāñēa] decided and excellent opinions that even those works (. . .) which are of form of My worship, should be carried out, like worship, day by day till one's death, giving up selfish attachment". These duties consist of regular and compulsory obligations (*nitya-karmā*), rites performed on specific occasions (*naimittika-*

karmā), and optional duties done with and specific intent and desire (*kāmya-karmā*).³

Yatīndramatadēpikā,⁴ a seventeenth-century exposition on the philosophy of Yatēndra or Rāmānuja, summarizes Rāmānuja's concept and purpose of *karma-yoga*.

It is non-prohibited action without any regard for the fruit, and is the shape of *kāmya*, *nitya* and *naimittika* actions. It is divided into worship of God, penance, pilgrimage, charity, sacrifice, etc. This, by destroying the impurities of the individual self, generates *jī'āna-yoga*, and through it or directly becomes the producer of *bhakti*. (Ādidevānanda, n.d., 95)

A person, who has thus conquered the mind by *karma-yoga* and has succeeded in attaining a vision of the self, can retire from the world of activity (*ātmāvalokanā*).

When one becomes pleased in himself with himself, that is, with his mind resting solely on the self within the self: and in consequence of this pleasure gives up all the other desires that have affected his mind: then he is spoken of as a man of steady understanding. This is the climax of firm devotion to knowledge (*jī'āna-yoga*). (Rāmānuja, 2002, 61)

According to Rāmānuja's rendition of *Bhagavad-gētā* (2.55-58), *jī'āna-yoga* consists of four stages: (1) it begins with the withdrawal of external senses from the objects of the senses. Avoiding emotional involvement with the world, one gradually gains the ability of perceiving the interior movement of the self. Hence, one's sole focus is on the mind (*manas*) and the *ātman*. (2) One consequently becomes affectionless in a sense that he or she does not show any positive emotional reaction toward what is enjoyable to the self, or

³ Daily rites such as chanting of the *gāyatrī*-mantra thrice a day (*sandhyāvandanā*) and using righteous means to protect the health of society and of the physical body are examples of *nitya-karma*. Executing penances to counteract sinful reactions, or offering oblations for the satisfaction of the ancestors, fall under the category of *naimittika-karma*. Any selfish, self-centred desire, like longing for material wealth, is *kāmya-karma* activity.

⁴ *Yatīndramatadēpikā*, a work of a sixteenth-century prominent Ārjavaiṅkara teacher, is a brief but comprehensive writing on epistemology, ontology, psychology, and theology of the Ārjavaiṅkaraism. Yatīrāja was a name given to Rāmānuja upon accepting the order of Vaiṅkara *sannyāsa*, the renounced order of life that symbolizes the surrender of thoughts, words, and the deeds to service of the Lord.

despises any unpleasant objects. (3) Afterwards one becomes a *muni*, a person, or more accurately, a “sage of steady understanding whose mind is not distressed amidst painful experiences, who is free of desire to enjoy pleasures and longings and who is free from fear and anger” (Rāmānuja, 2002, 61). (4) Finally, by focusing on *ātman* one completely abandons desire for anything else.

Regardless of so much physical and mental regulation, Rāmānuja’s *bhakti-yoga* is not a method of self-mastery, a practice of restraint exercised over one’s own impulses, emotions, or desires. It is the path of grace where a devotee depends on the free and unmerited favor of the Lord. Yogic discipline is still a necessary element in controlling the mind for attainment of release, but also detrimental for one’s spiritual path if practiced aside from recognition of and reliance upon the Lord (Lester, 1976, 101). The means include *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, the eightfold system of yoga propounded by Patañjali, but in a concept of worship and exclusive meditation on the Lord.

Rāmānuja differentiates between those that seek Lord’s refuge for some temporary benefit and those that search for Him out of affection only. For him, selfless devotion ranks above the materially motivated loyalty, or any kind of self-concern and egocentricity of certain types of *yoga*. Consequently, *bhakti-yoga* is a special kind of meditation (*dhyāna*), a loving contemplation of a devotee of his or her beloved Lord that includes mutual interaction between the Lord and His devotee. In the purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.18) Rāmānuja paraphrases Kāñēa.

I regard Myself as depending on him for My support and sustenance.
Why is it so? Because this man holds me to be the highest goal, finding it
impossible to support himself without me, therefore it is not possible for

Me to maintain Myself without him. Thus he is indeed Myself.
(Rāmānuja, 2002, 211)

Besides *dhyāna*, where a devotee fixes the mind without any interruption upon the Lord, like an unbroken stream of oil, worship (*mad-yājñ*), and offering of obeisances (*namaskāra*) are two other features of *bhakti-yoga*. They involve the body, mind, and senses, which makes it possible for a devotee to encounter and experience emotional relationship with the Supreme. Although he does not specify about the rules of worship, Rāmānuja hints at the *Pai-carātra* literature and common modes of worship as well. For example, in *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.34), he 'flirts' with the *Pai-carātra*.

Worship is well known to consists of all objects of enjoyment, such as those offered in ceremonial acts of homage (*aupachārika*) (like lights and incense), those which come in contact with the body (*sāmsparçikā*) (such as sandal paste and garlands of flowers), and those meant to be eaten (*abhyavahārika*). (Rāmānuja, 2002, 274)

While in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.14) he speaks about the more informal ways of worship.

Those in union (with Me) and who are resolved on service to Me with all their heart and soul, worship me always. (. . .) Remembering My names which are expressive of particular qualities of Mine, they always utter Nārāyaṇa, Kāṇḍa and Vāsudeva, and such other names with every part of their bodies thrilled and their voices made low and indistinct of joy. In the very same manner (i.e. with devotion at all times) they put endeavor to serve Me, in works done for My sake, such as worship, and in other activities helpful to them such as making of temples and gardens. (Rāmānuja, 2002, 257)

For Rāmānuja *bhakti-yoga* is thus much more than 'simple' meditation (*dhyāna*), pursuit of knowledge and Spartan life-style (*jīāna*), or ritualistic performance of action (*karmā*). It encompasses all these as a multilateral moral, religious, and spiritual discipline with a unique element of divine grace in it. *Bhakti-yoga* of Rāmānuja asks from a practitioner

loyalty to the Vedic social and occupational division of society undertaken and continued over a long time for the sole purpose of attaining God (Chari, 2000, 114).

4. The voice of pure devotion

Rāmānuja's primary mood in approaching God is that of awe and reverence. He opens up the possibility for emotional *bhakti*, but he does not clarify the meaning and importance of emotions in a structured way. The Lord's extraordinary power (*aīṣvarya*) serves as an impetus for *bhakti*, a meditative form of devotion with an overwhelming feeling of wonder and admiration. Accordingly, he approaches *bhakti* as a discipline that moulds and refines one's mental awareness and physical actions with a view of achieving God's grace. In contrast to that, *bhakti* depicted in the poetry of the Ālvārs is inspirational. It aims at evoking devotional sentiments in 'ordinary' people, or those bereft of profound Sanskrit education. *Ubhaya-vedānta* thus represents a unique blend of two seemingly contradictory streams of thought. Although some, including Hardy, view *Ubhaya-vedānta* as a mere pretense to cover up Ālvārs' emotionalism, recent works on the expressions of devotion in the early Ṣrīvaiṅṅava tradition suggest that Rāmānuja did not intend to conceal, confuse, or obscure the Ālvār tradition.

As Hopkins (1998, 11) noted, Rāmānuja aimed at establishing authority of the earlier and more acceptable *bhakti* of the *Pai-carātra* tradition and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Hence, he preferred warrior-prince Kāṅṅā of the *Bhagavad-gītā* as a model of God to Kāṅṅā as a cowherd boy and lover of the Gopis, a common theme of the Ālvār poetry. In his writings

there is no reference to the Tamil devotional hymns or mentioning any of the Ālvārs. While some modern Western students find this perplexing and fail to see the link between the historical Rāmānuja and the earlier Tamil devotional heritage, Carman (1994, 82-83) points to the social setting of the time in which Rāmānuja lived as a probable reason for this.

For various reasons, including connection made by many of Rāmānuja's disciples between their teacher and the Tamil tradition, I have concluded that the community's faith in the link between Rāmānuja and Nammalvar rests on historical fact. Rāmānuja wanted to convince Brahmins in all parts of India that his interpretation of the Sanskrit Vedas was correct, and to do so he quoted in support only those scriptures that had common acceptance among Brahmins, saying nothing about favorite passages in more sectarian Sanskrit scriptures that his followers frequently referred to. It is not surprising that he was silent about a very daring Ṣṛivaiñēava belief that a poem in a language other than Sanskrit, admittedly composed by a Sudra, a member of the fourth caste, could be a source of divine revelation equal to the sacred Vedas.

Furthermore, many of the early biographical writings firmly place the great commentator in the Ālvār and *Pai'carātra* tradition. When the tradition speaks for itself, it testifies to a connection between the erudite theologian and the prior Tamil heritage. Certainly, in some cases, the biographers would write many admiring things about Rāmānuja, things that would enlarge his significance beyond the bounds of truth. Narayanan (1987, 89) holds it for "highly improbable that the early *ācāryas* would fabricate hundreds of incidents associating Rāmānuja with the *Tiruvāymoly* and the Ālvārs and indulge in a carefully plotted conspiracy to draft him into the Ṣṛé Vaiñēava tradition". The fact that Rāmānuja introduced recitation of the Ālvārs' poetry in the Ṣṛé Raī gam temple, accepted several non-Brahmin disciples, and even took to the renounced order of life when

his wife snubbed the caste of one of his teachers, shows his open-mindedness toward the Älvärs and their emotionalism.

To demonstrate the connection between the two scriptural streams of *Ubhaya-vedānta*, some of Rāmānuja's immediate disciples wrote elaborate commentaries on the Älvärs' poetry in the Sanskritized form of Tamil called Maëipravāla. They used the standard Vedic proof texts to show the truth and accuracy of philosophical points that they regarded were implicit in the Älvär verses. The intended meaning of these commentaries was to confirm the "similarities that the authors believed existed between the two Vedas" (Nayanar, 1993, 62).

Another aspect of Rāmānuja's opus that intimately links him with the Älvär emotionalism are his *stotras*. As a literary genre, *stotra* is a form of poetry written in prose that uses elaborate and somewhat artificial Sanskrit language to praise and eulogize God. According to Nayanar (1993, 62), "in his short compositions of devotional prose (*Gadya Trayā*), the philosopher expressed a rather reserved form of Älvär icon-orientated emotionalism and implicitly acknowledged the importance of surrender (*prapattī*)". On the one hand, they represent the voice of pure devotion, and, on the other, serve as a medium of synthesis of the Sanskrit and Tamil Vedas.

Understandably, the Çrévaiñēavas sought to unite the Tamil and the Sanskrit Vedas at a variety of levels, and just as the tradition of Sanskrit commentary on the Veda is balanced by the tradition of Maëipravāla commentary on the Älvär hymns, so the Tamil praise-hymns of the Älvärs are balanced by the Sanskrit praise-hymns of the Äcāryas. (Nayanar, 1993, 60)

In his *Gadyas* Rāmānuja fervently pleads for the Lord’s grace, mercy and engagement in divine service. The Lord’s kindness represents the last resort for him, since, according to his own admission, he does not qualify for, nor has properly performed *bhakti-*, *karma-*, or *jīāna-yoga* (Narayanan, 1987, 87). What else then remains but *prapatti* or absolute self-surrender to the Lord? He only hints at that kind of dependence in his commentary to the famous *carama-çloka*, the Lord’s last instruction in the *Bhagavad-gētā* (18.66). As suggested by the Lord Himself, one should renounce all different kinds of religious and ritualistic performances and solely depend on Him. For Rāmānuja that means that one should renounce the sense of ownership of activities, the false conception of being the doer, and reject the fruits of those activities as well. One simply has to let go. In return, the Lord protects his devotee from all kinds of fear and sin. According to an alternative interpretation of the verse

the Lord spoke this, driving away the grief of Arjuna, who felt dejected, thinking that *bhakti-yoga* can be practiced successfully only by a person to whom the Lord is inexpressibly dear and who is free from all sins. (...) In order to succeed in starting *bhakti-yoga* surrender, finding refuge in Me alone (...) I shall release you from all sins the nature of which has been described and which are opposed to the commencement of the discipline of devotion. Do not grieve. (Rāmānuja, 2003, 527)

Narayanan (1987, 87) thus concludes that Rāmānuja’s understanding of *bhakti-yoga* incorporates *prapatti*, or committing oneself fully to the Lord, a predominant theme of the Ālvār poetry.

As an *ācārya*, Rāmānuja intended to establish temple-orientated devotion as a legitimate philosophical system on an equal footing with the other accepted schools of thought. His explanation of Vedānta, later named *viçñūādvaita*, opened the door of

Vedāntic discourse for the Vaiñēavas giving them strong arguments to pursue their cause — belief and devotion to a single God. Besides this intellectual task, he also had to show the parallels and tangible connection between the Tamil Veda and philosophy of *viçivādvaita*. Here he had to appeal more to the emotions and devotional sentiments of the common people. Consequently, Rāmānuja's *bhakti-yoga* is devotion guided by reason and what is perplexing for some was his veiled emotionalism that was prevented from being seen in the majority of his writings. Therefore, I cannot support Hardy's viewpoint because I think it is unbalanced and fails to acknowledge the 'both . . . and' aspects of Rāmānuja's work. Considering the historical circumstances and the assignment that he was ordained to fulfill, his *modus operandi* becomes very reasonable.

Whereas Rāmānuja did not openly attempt to defend Ālvārs' emotionalism, in the following section my focus is on the Caitanya Vaiñēava tradition that draws mainly from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and presents systematic treatment of emotional devotion. Caitanya Vaiñēavas also had to face the same test that Rāmānuja faced earlier — to harmonize devotion with the prevalent conventional standards and the orthodoxy of action and practice of the existing Hindu community. The next section explores the expressions of emotional devotion in Caitanya Vaiñēava traditions and ways in which the Caitanya Vaiñēava tradition dealt with the challenge of presenting emotionalism in the orthodox Hindu setting.

5. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*— the ultimate scripture

Besides a plethora of vernacular texts, oral narrations, and dramatizations, for the Caitanya Vaiṇēavas *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the fundamental canonical scripture. It blends the Vedāntic philosophy with the popular narrations about the legend of Kāṇḍa, thus enthusing creative thinking and work of scholars and devout villagers alike.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a scripture superbly written, with aesthetic sensitivity, devotional intensity, and metaphysical subtlety; a tapestry resplendent in color, its intertwining motifs and its dancing figures, therein expressing a universe in which the divine and created worlds differentiate and identify in an endless sequence of mutual transformations. (Sheridan, 1986, vii)

However, the provenance and date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* remains a disputed and much debated issue among the scholars. For example, S. Dasgupta (1975, 26) feels that “the *Bhāgavata* is a collection of accretions from different hands at different times and not a systematic whole”. Others, like Sheridan (1986, 7), would opt for a single author or one main editor at least. Assigning a date to the text seems to be even more of a ‘mystery’ for the scholars since they differ in their opinions by 2500 years in both extremes. Some even refuse to give a specific date on any *Purāṇa* as a whole, because *Purāṇas* are a fluid body of literature that went on transforming in the process of transmission of customs and beliefs from generation to generation (Rosen, 2006, 140). According to the general agreement among scholars today, it seems most likely that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* stems from a South Indian hand at the time of the main period of the Ālvār activity between the seventh and tenth centuries.

Thus in context of Tamil devotion, a group of ascetical devotees composed or redacted the *Bhāgavata Purāēa* in Sanskrit, infusing the dynamic elements of emotional and ecstatic devotion into the inherited matrix of the quiet, peaceful devotion stemming from the *Bhagavad-gētā* (Sheridan, 1986, 99)

The *Bhāgavata Purāēa* itself attributes its origin to Vyāsadeva who, according to the tradition, compiled the original Vedic scriptures. From the First Canto we learn that Vyāsadeva, after he wrote the whole body of Vedic literature, still felt despondent and unhappy at heart. The reason for his despair, as his spiritual master Nārada told him, was leaving out the most important part of the scriptures — the glories of the Lord. To compensate for his omission, he composed *Bhāgavata Purāēa*, the scripture that focuses exclusively on the Lord's activities in his various manifestations. Caitanya Vaiñēavas thus treat *Bhāgavata Purāēa* as an eternal revelation coming from God (*apauruṣeyā*) that contains the essence of Vedic teachings and perfectly explains the *Vedānta-sūtra*.

Unlike the *Bhagavad-gētā* that primarily focuses on the Lord's majestic aspect (*aicvarya*), the *Bhāgavata* also incorporates the Lord's *mādhurya* feature, an attribute of the Lord when he conceals his opulence. This facilitates intimacy that breeds devotion characterized by ecstasy, excitement, and elation beyond the bounds of sobriety. In Canto One Nārada relates his trance-like experience when he, sitting under the Pippala tree in an uninhabited forest, meditated on the Lord. With his mind overwhelmed and subdued by devotion, eyes swimming with tears of longing to see the Lord, the Lord finally appeared. At that time, Nārada experienced devotional ecstasy. Overwhelmed by the joy of union, he could see neither himself nor the Lord. Then the Lord disappeared, leaving him greatly despaired and disorientated. These symptoms characterize emotional *bhakti*, however,

Nārada still belongs to the *Bhāgavata's* conservative type of devotion. "The ecstasy and love described here are but one exceptional phase in his life of Nārada who was ascetic, yogin, and devotee" (Sheridan, 1986, 100). The 'new' wave of emotional *bhakti* becomes more evident in Prahlāda, one of the foremost authorities on *bhakti-yoga* (*mahā-bhāgavato mahān*).⁵

The Seventh Canto tells the story of Prahlāda, whose attachment to Lord Kāñēa was natural even from the very early childhood. His mind fully absorbed in thoughts of the Lord, he could not find satisfaction in childish playthings. In his case Sheridan (1986, 101) points out that in addition to inward contemplation, Prahlāda's devotion takes a "vivid ecstatic expression outwardly".

Sometimes his consciousness would get mixed with anxiety for the Lord, and being agitated, he cried. Sometimes he would laugh in the excitement of his meditation about him; sometimes he would sing loudly. Sometimes he shouted at the top of his voice. Sometimes, banishing all the sense of bashfulness, he would dance about. Sometimes, being filled with thoughts about him and feeling absorbed in him completely, he would imitate him.⁶ (Tagare, 1976, 908)

The emotional *bhakti* of the *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* reaches its final and most climactic stage in the devotion of the inhabitants of Vraja, Vāndāvana-Kāñēa's eternal abode. In the land of Vraja, Kāñēa, whom the *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* identifies as the Supreme Being, replaces majestic opulence with his enchanting sweetness. This enables close and warm relationship that would not be possible otherwise. Here we are reminded of the episode that occurs at the end of the eleventh chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*. After witnessing Lord's *virāṭ-rupa*,

⁵ *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* (7.7.10)

⁶ *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* (7.4.39-40)

universal form of the Lord by which he pervades the entire creation, Arjuna is exceedingly pleased but his mind is distressed and filled with fear. Therefore, he desires to see the Lord as he saw him before, in his gentle two-handed form. To appease his devotee, Kāñëa assumes his original appearance that precedes all other manifestations of divinity. Not by austerity, not by the study of Vedas, nor by severe austerities one can see the Lord in such a form, “only by the offering of one’s love to none other” is he to be known (Schweig, 2007, 167).⁷

It would certainly be misleading to qualify all devotion of the *Bhāgavata Purāëa* as emotional. There are devotees like the four Kumāras or king Pāthu that practice reverential type of devotion directed toward Viñëu, the all-pervading God that supervises the maintenance of the created universe. Nevertheless, *Bhāgavata Purāëa* points at the emotional devotion of the inhabitants of Vraja as the best and most complete way of worshiping the Lord. While the first nine cantos describe various *avatāras*, such as Nāsiàha, Varāha, or Vāmana, the tenth canto deals exclusively with the divine play of Kāñëa (Kāñëa-*līlā*). All these manifestations of divinity demonstrate the Lord’s superiority, but, as Sheridan indicates (1986, 68), they “form a prologue, teaching indeed about Bhagavān Kāñëa, but only in order to show forth his full glory and splendor in the tenth canto”.

Krishna is also known as *pūrëāvatāra*, the “full descent of the deity.” Thus the [Caitanya] Vaishnavas regard Krishna as descending to earth through the power of his Vishnu form. (. . .) The most intimate form of God is the ultimate form of deity, which I have termed “The Intimate Supreme Deity of the Godhead.” From this foundational level comes “The Omnipotent Cosmic Deity,” who is Vishnu, “the manifestation of God’s sustaining power and almightiness.” (. . .) Vishnu, then, is the immediate source of the divinity of this world, the manifested deity

⁷ *Bhagavad-gētā*(11.54)

Krishna, as well as other *avatāra* manifestations. (Schweig, 2005, 108-109)

In Vraja, Kāñēa is the central object of everybody's affection. He is the most charming son of Nanda Mahārāja and Yaçodā Mātā, cheerful and jovial friend of Çrédāmā, and the lover of the *gopés*, the cowherd girls of Vraja. Although Kāñēa possesses all possible powers, the loving devotion (*prema*) of the Vrajavāsés binds and controls him, as he would be inferior to them. This bondage, however, is not a flaw that spoils or lessens his position as the omnipotent cosmic deity. Rather, it ornaments his personality and shows his versatility and superiority as the intimate supreme deity of Godhead.⁸ Elaborating further on the nature of Kāñēa's dealings with his devotees and their devotion for him, the Caitanya Vaiñēava teachers, Rūpa Gosvāmé (1489-1564 CE) in particular, have broadly defined it as *rasa*. Certainly, the most famous example of *rasa* comes from the Tenth Canto when Kāñēa performed his *rasa-līlā*, "dance of divine love," with the *gopés*.

Regarding the mood of those nights brightened by the rays of the autumn moon, He [Kāñēa] enjoyed singing sweet songs as the ornament in the circle of woman.⁹

⁸ "The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kāñēa, the son of mother Yaçodā, is accessible to devotees engaged in spontaneous loving service, but He is not as easily accessible to mental speculators, to those striving for self-realization by severe austerities and penances, or to those who consider the body the same as the self". *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* (10.9.21)

⁹ *Bhāgavata Purāñēa* (3.2.34) translation by Graham M. Schweig.

6. Devotion as *rasa*

Literally translated *rasa* means 'sap, juice of plants', or 'any kind of liquid or fluid'. It comes from the Sanskrit poets (*Kāvya*) and dramatic theory in the Sanskrit drama of classical India (*Nāṭyaśāstra*) written by the sage Bharata. His main idea was to determine how a particular emotion could be aroused in the audience when they view an artistic performance. For that reason, he developed a sophisticated theory of human emotions. Bharata observed that human beings experience a wide range of natural feelings, distinguished from reasoning or knowledge, and physiological conditions (*bhāvas*) that influence behavioral changes in the body. He came up with the list of forty-one main emotions, *bhāvas*, but mentioned that only eight of them have a permanent and long-lasting effect (*sthāyī-bhāvas*) on human behavior.¹⁰ They exist in the mind and heart of everyone as latent impressions (*vāsanās*) from images in this life or experiences from past lives. With the proper combination of environmental conditions (*vibhāva*), external bodily responses (*anubhāva*) and accessory emotions (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*) that support and sustain *sthāyī-bhāva*, Bharata maintained, one can experience *rasa* (Haberman, 1988, 16).¹¹

Integration of the *rasa* theory to religious life and practice of *bhakti* is Rūpa's foremost contribution to the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava School. Although Caitanya (1485-1535 CE) was the founder of the sect, except for the eight devotional verses, he did not leave any other scriptural writings behind. Rather, he appointed the six theologians, later famed as

¹⁰ The eight *sthāyī-bhāvas* mentioned by Bharata are: passion (*ratī*), humor (*hāsā*), anger (*krodhā*), sorrow (*śokā*), effort (*utsahā*), astonishment (*vismayā*), disgust (*jugupsā*), and fear (*bhayā*).

¹¹ *Nāṭya-śāstra* (6.32) *Vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicāri-samyogād rasānīpattī*

the Six Gosvāmés of Vāndāvana, to systematize the teachings of the young movement and create a set of authoritative principles, beliefs, and practices based on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹²

Since emotion was seen as the highest approach to the Kāñēa, who reveals himself in a cosmic drama, Rūpa recognized the usefulness of the existing *rasa* theory to explain the process of *bhakti*. In fact, Kāñēa himself came to be defined as *rasa*. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* had already equated *rasa* with Brahman (2.7: *raso vai sa*). Rūpa continued this identification, understanding *rasa* now more in terms of Bharata's dramatics, and addresses Kāñēa as the reservoir of all *rasas* (Haberman, 1988, 33)

Although non-different ontologically, because of his *rasas* endowed with the highest type of divine love (*prema*), Kāñēa surpasses Nārāyaṇa.¹³ This *prema* is most vividly expressed in the selfless devotion of the Vrajavāsés, residents of Vraja. Hence, the purity of their *bhakti* became the role model and inspiration for the practicing devotees to follow. Pure *bhakti*, as Rūpa defines it, excludes all daily and periodic materialistic rituals of *karma* and impersonal *jī'āna*, or the inquiry about undifferentiated impersonal Brahman. It also leaves out all other practices such as renunciation or *yoga* that do not exclusively aim at the Lord's satisfaction. It consists of continuous devotional service directed toward Kāñēa, his expansion forms or others related to him, with a pleasing attitude toward Kāñēa.¹⁴

¹² The famed Six Gosvāmés of Vāndāvana (Rūpa Gosvāmé, Sanātana Gosvāmé, Jéva Gosvāmé, Gopāla Bhaṅgā Gosvāmé, Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmé and Raghunātha Bhaṅgā Gosvāmé) were deputed personally by Caitanya to go to Vāndāvana, write devotional literature on the culture of Kāñēa bhakti, and excavate the present places of pilgrimage.

¹³ *Bhakti-rasāmāta-sindhu* (1.2.59)

¹⁴ *anyābhilāñitā-çūnyāḥ jī'āna-karmādy-anāvātām
ānukūlyena kāñēānu-çānaḥ bhaktir uttamā
Bhakti-rasāmāta-sindhu* (1.1.11)

Rüpa believes that this love or *rati* for Kãñëa, called *sthãyi-bhãva*, belongs to the essential nature of every human being. In the conditioned stage of material existence it is not active but capable of becoming active by the appropriate practice — *sãdhana-bhakti*.

Action of the senses, which produces the stage of *bhãva*, is called *sãdhana-bhakti*. This attained state of *bhãva-bhakti* is an eternal *sthãyi-bhãva* which is not created, but simply manifests within the soul by the spiritual energy of the Lord.¹⁵ (Rüpa, 2006, 85)

Although he prescribes a very steady, earnest, and energetic effort to please God, *sãdhana* alone does not bestow *rasa*. To be able to grow a seed needs watering, but also the heat and light of the sun. Similarly, Rüpa reasons that to spring up and develop to maturity, the *rati* for Kãñëa needs the divine touch of the Lord's devotional energy (*çuddha-sattva*).¹⁶ Diligent *sãdhana* purifies the heart by which a person becomes a worthy recipient of divine favor. Upon receiving it, one's inborn affection for Kãñëa becomes heightened to a "relishable nature on being nourished in an amazing manner through hearing and other actions" (Rüpa, 2006, 426).¹⁷ For Rüpa this is *bhakti-rasa*, the mellow derived from devotional service where one develops great relish for hearing *Bhãgavata Purãëa*, enjoys the associations of others who have taste for Kãñëa, and becomes absorbed in glorifying Kãñëa (*kãrtana*). Under the broad category of *bhakti-rasa*, Rüpa recognizes five distinguished types of relationships: (1) *çãnta-rasa* or reverential love, (2) *dãsyã-rasa* or subservient love, (3) *sakhya-rasa* or friendly love, (4) *vãtsalyã-rasa* or parental love, and (5) *mãdhuryã-rasa* or passionate love.

¹⁵ *Bhakti-rasãmãta-sindhu* (1.2.2)

¹⁶ *Bhakti-rasãmãta-sindhu* (1.3.1)

¹⁷ *Bhakti-rasãmãta-sindhu* (2.1.5)

1. *Çänta-rasa* is the first of the five *rasas*. Recognizing Lord's majestic attributes, a devotee in *çänta-rasa* approaches the Lord with great respect and admiration. With feelings of reverence, considering him hallowed and exalted, a devotee loves him from a distance as a faithful and submissive citizen would venerate a powerful head of state. Such relationship leaves out intimate personal dealings. While the realization of Lord's attractive form, pleasing to the eye and mind, is the main stimuli for the appearance of *çänta-rasa*, devotees in the other four *rasas* are attracted more by the divine play (*lälä*) of Kãñëa.¹⁸
2. Also known as joyful *rasa* (*priti-rasä*), *däsya-rasa* manifests when adoration in the heart of the devotees achieves enjoyable nature.¹⁹ The devotees in *däsya-rasa* identify themselves as Kãñëa's servants and serve him respectfully as personal servants would directly serve their king. Seeing him face-to-face, devotees in *däsya-rasa* take pleasure in close personal company of the Lord. Since *däsya-rasa* arises out of general respect for the splendid and opulent Lord, it is formal and devoid of unique intimacy that occurs when one observes the Lord without his majestic veneer.
3. In *Sakhya-rasa*, third of the five *rasas*, a devotee enjoys close and warm friendship with the Lord. "With his complexion delicate as a blue sapphire, brilliant white smile like a *kunda* flower, his cloth yellow like the golden *ketaki* flower, forest garland shining on his chest", Rüpa (2006, 144) writes, Kãñëa captures the minds of his

¹⁸ *Bhakti-rasämäta-sindhu*(3.1.6)

¹⁹ *Bhakti-rasämäta-sindhu*(3.2.3)

cowherd friends. Consequently, with his friends (*sakhas*) he, the creator and ruler of the universe, wrestles, plays with a ball, or rides on others' shoulders and jokes constantly in his light-hearted joy of fun making.

4. When devotees treat Kāñëa with fondness, affection, or kindness of a loving parent they are situated in *vātsalya-rasa*. The Lord is their child in need of their support and thus they dutifully nourish Kāñëa, as he would be dependent on them. Even if Kāñëa sometimes manifests his godly powers, his parents and elders attribute it to something else, divine intervention or extraordinary smile of fortune upon their child. Whereas, in previous *rasas* the love and devotion are expressed from a lower or equal position, in *vātsalya-rasa* care for Kāñëa comes through the 'higher' parental position.

5. The devotees in *mādhurya-rasa* experience the greatest intimacy of *rasa*. Dealings between the Lord and his devotees in the *mādhurya-rasa* appear similar to the *rasa* of mundane love. Because it is difficult to describe and very confidential, Rūpa cautions the unsuspecting reader that one cannot appreciate and taste this *rasa* if one lacks the qualification for it. Only the pure heart, mixed with the waves of *prema*, can taste the ultimate sweetness of *mādhurya-rasa*.²⁰ Aroused by the sound of Kāñëa's flute, the season of spring, or the call of the cuckoo, the milk maidens of Vraja leave all their domestic duties behind and run to meet the Lord of their hearts. Occasional separation of lovers only heightens the joy of their passionate union.

²⁰ *Bhakti-rasāmāta-sindhu* (3.5.2)

7. Quest for authority

In terms of theology and spiritual practices, the doctrine of Caitanya differs significantly from the approach of previous Vaiñëava teachers. Caitanya undoubtedly builds up his system of *bhakti-yoga* on the theism of earlier *ācāryas*, but also presents it in his own unique way. How did he and his followers support and confirm the validity of his method on a sound and authoritative basis? In the following two sections, I focus on two important tools by which followers of Caitanya tried to validate his mode and practice of 'emotional' Kāñëa-*bhakti*— (1) use of the highly developed *kāvya* tradition in their writings, and (2) affiliation with an already existing Vaiñëava disciplic lineage.

7.1 Spiritual poetry

The tradition of Kāñëa-centered Vaiñëavism, initiated by Caitanya in the early sixteenth century, spread rapidly through Bengal, Orissa, and northern parts of India. Along with his close disciples, Caitanya brought back to life and strengthened the ancient culture of Kāñëa-*bhakti*. This practice has been widely accepted by the common people but somewhat disregarded by the Brahmins and administrators, the richest, best educated, and most influential groups in the Hindu society. Therefore, to establish devotion to Kāñëa as the quintessence of Vedic teachings, purest form of *bhakti* that permeates all nature, instead of vernacular Bengali, Caitanya's followers used the Sanskrit language. For Rūpa and his followers, the Sanskrit language and its poetic conventions were tools to be used in the

service of Kāñëa-*bhakti*, indeed this was their ultimate purpose and their fulfillment (Brzezinski, 1999, 31).

The word Sanskrit comes from the past participle *samskrta*, 'perfected', 'refined', or 'cultured', where *sam* means 'together', and *karoti*, 'he makes'. Thus, literally translated, it is the refined language appealing to cultured and sophisticated people. Like the Latin or Greek in Europe, the educated Brahmins have used Sanskrit as the main language of religious rituals, a medium of communication between people and God. Sanskrit thus became the classical literary language of India applied in sacred ceremonies since the time of *Āg Veda*, the earliest of the four Vedas.²¹ For that reason, the Gosvāmés of Vāñdāvana preferred Sanskrit to the dialects spoken by the ordinary people even though the great majority of them did not speak or write in Sanskrit. The Gosvāmés took the highest and most refined aspect of Hindu culture and Kāñëa-ized it for their purpose.

They saw the expressive and psychological connection between *bhakti-yoga* and Sanskrit poetry. Accordingly, they employed various figures of speech, metaphors, and hyperboles of Sanskrit poetry to create a certain emotional effect analogous to devotional feelings. In the Hindu social milieu, poetry has an illustrious reputation and it is greatly respected because of its high literary quality. Whereas theology explores the existence and attributes of God in a rational way, the Gosvāmés believed that the fullness of divine nature and the essence of his divinity go beyond the reach of the meditative process and have to be experienced in deep emotional and loving ecstasy. As explained by Jēva Gosvāmé, these

²¹ The Vedas are divided into four divisions: *Āg Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*.

ambrosia-like conclusions can be savored by the palate that is learned in the poetic art (Brzezinski, 1996, 107). However, without the underlying philosophical and theological understanding (*siddhāntā*), one cannot experience *bhakti-rasa*. Lacking proper understanding about God's 'god-ness' (*aiçvarya*) and 'human-ness' (*mādhuryā*), a person will misidentify mundane emotions and feelings as *bhakti-rasa*, the sacred devotional rapture.

Though in its highest form, devotional sentiment feigns ignorance of Kāñëa's divine status, ultimately this knowledge runs like an undercurrent through all Kāñëa-conscious writings. The relation of Kāñëa's 'god-ness' (*aiçvarya*) to his 'sweetness' (*mādhuryā*), or 'human-ness,' to use Jéva's example, is that of Sarasvaté to the Ganges at Triveëë: it cannot be seen but its currents flow there outside the range of vision. (Brzezinski, 1999, 31)

Caitanya Vaiñëava tradition attaches importance to the vernacular poetry as well, but for purpose of establishing a canon, early teachers of the tradition used the more prestigious Sanskrit poetry. Sanskrit poetic tradition is a part of their social heritage and because they knew it well, they were able to present some key theological and liturgical concepts through *kāvya*, the most exquisite form of Sanskrit literal expression. One can find numerous examples of beautiful Kāñëa-ized *kāvya* in the writings of the Gosvāmés and teachers that followed them. For instance, Kavi-karëapüra Gosvämé, a noted sixteenth-century author of Sanskrit poems and plays and one of Caitanya's leading followers, writes in the introductory verse of *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāïaka*.

Its nine new *candrakāntha* jewels of devotional service eclipsing Kuvera's lily, lotus, conch, and other treasures, and its arrows of light wounding the *cakravāka* bird of Kali-yuga, may the moon of Lord Gaura destroy the darkness of the world. (Kavi, 1989, 1)

Caitanya or Gaura, 'the golden one', as his followers used to address him, is for the Caitanya Vaiñëavas the combined *avatāra* of Kāñëa and his eternal consort Rādhā. To taste

her love for him, Kāñëa steals the mood and golden complexion of Rādhā and appears as Caitanya. In this world, he acts as a devotee and teaches Kāñëa-*bhakti*. Because he bestows “what no incarnation has ever offered before: the most elevated mellow of devotional service, the mellow of conjugal love [*ujjvala-rasām*]”, his manifestation is unique.²² As the Sanskrit bards of the past believed, the moonstone (*candrakāñthā*) when bathed in the cooling rays of the moon, emits liquid or *rasa*. Similarly, when the nine moonstones of devotion, or the nine processes of devotional service are exposed to the moon that is Caitanya, they give out *rasa*.²³ Furthermore, with the nine moonstones of devotion he also renders dull the material treasures of Kuvera, one of the important gods in heaven, and the treasurer of wealth. Just as the *cakravāka* bird separates from the lover when the moon rises, the golden moon of Caitanya divides the degraded age (Kali-yuga) from its companions like sin, corruption, and moral decadence. Therefore, may Gaura drive away the darkness of the world!

7.2 The *sampradāya* of Caitanya

According to Monier-Williams (2002, 1175), *sampradāya* denotes tradition, an established doctrine transmitted from one teacher to another. In an unbroken line of spiritual masters (*gurus*) and their disciples (*śiṣyas*), *sampradāya* is a channel through which

²² *Caitanya-caritāmāta* (1.3.4)

²³ Prahāda Mahārājālist lists the nine process of devotional service as follows: (1) *śravaṇam*, hearing, (2) *kīrtanam*, chanting, (3) *viññēou-smaraṇam*, remembering of Lord Viññēu, (4) *pāda-sevana*, serving the feet, (5) *arcanam*, offering of worship, (6) *vandana*, offering prayers, (7) *dāśyam*, becoming the servant, (8) *sakhyam*, becoming the best friend, and (9) *ātma-nivedanam*, surrendering everything, whatever one has to the Lord.

the tradition preserves and perpetuates its belief system. Even if a person wants to start a new *sampradāya*, the Indian religious tradition maintains that one has to be affiliated with an already existing *sampradāya*. Membership in a particular *sampradāya*, which is usually achieved by initiation, allows the person to express his or her opinion freely, speak up, and gain authority for his or her ideas. Even Çai kara says that “a man who does not belong to a sect must be ignored as if he was a fool” (Kapoor, 1976, 39). From that perspective, it is unthinkable that Caitanya would not link his Kāñëa-centered Vaiñëavism with an already operating and valid Vaiñëava *sampradāya*. Which one is it, and on what grounds did he seek this affiliation?

A similar question was raised in the mid-eighteenth century in Jaipur when there was a dispute whom the temple priest should worship — Kāñëa or Nārāyaëa. Caitanya Vaiñëavas, who were at the time responsible for the temple worship, preferred Vāndāvana Kāñëa in the form of Govinda, one who gives pleasure to the land, the cows and the senses. This certainly did not sit well with the other Vaiñëava sects. Therefore, the ruler of Jaipur called the learned pundits to calm down the tensions and resolve the quarrel. On behalf of the Caitanya School, a young and learned scholar, Baladeva, started the debate by showing the connection between the Caitanya’s teachings and the Mādhva *sampradāya*.²⁴ However,

²⁴ Also known as Anandatërtha or Pürnaprajī a, Mādhva (1238-1317 CE) is the founder of *dvaita-vada* school of Vedānta. Like Rāmānuja, Mādhva also identifies Brahman with the supreme personal deity, Viñëu. However, he argues that any system that places the living entity and the Lord within the same reality, as Rāmānuja’s *viçññädvaita* does, challenges Visnu’s superiority, compromises his pre-eminence, and lessens the value of devotional activities. For Mādhva there is a fundamental difference between the living entity and the Lord. Caitanya’s doctrine called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, simultaneous oneness and difference of the Lord and his expansions, goes against both of these positions.

during the heated debate it became obvious that Caitanya's doctrine differs from not only Mādhva but also other schools of Vaiñēavism (Kapoor, 1976, 38).²⁵

Nevertheless, Kapoor (1976, 38) also points out that doctrinal differences do not necessarily exclude Caitanya from the membership in the Mādhva *sampradāya*. Obtaining the *Daçākñāra Kññēa-mantra* from Ēçvara Puré, a disciple of Mādhvendra Puré of the Mādhva *sampradāya*, Caitanya also became a formal member of the Mādhva *sampradāya*. The initiation happened in the province of Gayā, Bihar, which, according to Kapoor (1976, 21), at the time was known as the center of the Mādhva sect. Ironically, even Mādhva himself, although officially initiated into the *advaita sampradāya* of Çai kara, vigorously propagated the path of devotion and worship of a personal God. Thus, the fact that Caitanya's view of *bhakti-yoga* is distinct in nature, form, and characteristics from Mādhva's, does not cut off his relationship with the Mādhva *sampradāya*. Since mere ceremonial initiation suffices in claiming the membership, in theory a person can be a member of a particular *sampradāya* and yet not follow the teachings and principles of the sect. Accepting Ēçvara Puré as his *guru*, Caitanya followed the injunction of the revealed scriptures (*çāstras*) relating to the formal necessity of initiation. Rather than the content, Caitanya accepted the outward form of *sampradāya* system only to be in accordance with

²⁵ Unless supported by an original commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra*, nobody was ready to recognize Caitanya Vaiñēavas as independent and genuine Vaiñēava sect. For that reason, Baladeva compiled a commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra* under the inspiration of Lord Govinda Himself, hence the name *Govinda-bhāñya*. While further pursuing the theism of Rāmānuja and Mādhva, Baladeva's erudite effort shed new light on the *sūtras* as well. All were impressed and won over and they honored Baladeva with the title Vidyābhūñāēa, the ornament of knowledge. Looking from that perspective, one can understand Broo (2003, 35), when he describes Caitanya's mission as "a special kind of religious organization falling between the mystery group and founded religion".

the established conventions, which later gave space to his followers to assert their position as an autonomous and genuine Vaiñëava sect.

8. The supreme perfection of *rasa*

My dear friend, just see how Kãñëa is enjoying His transcendental pastimes in the spring by expanding the beauty of His personal body. His soft legs and hands, just like the most beautiful moon, are used on the bodies of the *gopis*. When He embraces different parts of their bodies, He is so beautiful. Kãñëa is so beautiful that He attracts even Nãrãyaëa, as well as the goddess of fortune who associates with Nãrãyaëa.²⁶
(Bhaktivedanta, 1974b, 324)

As indicated in the statement above, Kãñëa is the foundation or *ãlambana*, the basis on which a variety of *rasas* is grounded. By the sweetness of his handsome form (*rũpa-mãdhuryã*), his wonderful pastimes (*lãlã-mãdhuryã*), the enchanting sounds of his flute (*veëu-mãdhuryã*), and the company of his loving associates (*prema-mãdhuryã*), Kãñëa attracts all, even his 'lesser self', that is, Lord Nãrãyaëa and his consort Lakimë, the goddess of fortune. According to Rũpa, no other *avatãra* possesses these qualities.²⁷ Thus, even Lakimë herself, although eternally situated on Nãrãyaëa's chest, performed penances to attain that unequalled *rasa* with Kãñëa.²⁸

²⁶ *viçveñãm anurã i janena janayann ãnandam indëvara-
çreëë-çyãmala-komalair upanayann ãi gair anãi gotsavam
svacchandaã vraja-sundarãbhãr abhitaũ pratyã gam ãlã gitaũ
çãi gãraũ sakhi mũrtimãn iva madhau mugdho hariũ krãõati
Gãta-govinda* (1.11)

²⁷ *Bhakti-rasãmãta-sindhu* (2.1.43)

²⁸ "O Lord, we do not know how the serpent Kãliya has attained this great opportunity of being touched by the dust of Your lotus feet. For this end, the goddess of fortune performed austerities for centuries, giving up all other desires and taking austere vows". *Bhãgavata Purãëa* (10.16.36)

Further evidence that indicates Kāñëa's pre-eminence over Lord Nārāyaëa, is recorded, rather humorously, in *Caitanya-caritāmāta*, Caitanya's authorized biography written in the late sixteenth century by Kāñëadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmé. As was customary for traveling mendicants during the four months of the rainy season, Caitanya stopped traveling and stayed at one place. That place happened to be Çré Raì gam, the topmost of the 108 divine centres mentioned in *Divyaprabhandham* as well as a foremost seat of the teachings of Rāmānuja. Caitanya found refuge in the house of Veì kaōa Bhaōōa, a Vaiñëava of the Rāmānuja *sampradāya* and a faithful worshiper of Lakīmé-Nārāyaëa. After four months of constant association, Caitanya and Veì kaōa Bhaōōa had gradually developed a friendly relationship. At one point, Caitanya accepted Lakīmé as the chastest and most gracious woman in the whole creation, yet still wondered how it was possible for a woman of such nobility to hanker for Kāñëa's company, a cowherd boy who is engaged in tending cows.

Veì kaōa Bhaōōa then said, "Lord Kāñëa and Lord Nārāyaëa are one and the same, but the pastimes of Kāñëa are more relishable due to their sportive nature. Since Kāñëa and Nārāyaëa are the same personality, Lakīmé's association with Kāñëa does not break her vow of chastity. Rather, it was in great fun that the goddess of fortune wanted to associate with Lord Kāñëa. Veì kaōa Bhaōōa continued, "According to transcendental realization, there is no difference between the forms of Nārāyaëa and Kāñëa. Yet in Kāñëa there is a special transcendental attraction due to the conjugal mellow, and consequently He surpasses Nārāyaëa. This is the conclusion of transcendental mellows."²⁹
(Bhaktivedanta, 1975, 354-355)

One could argue that Kāñëadāsa portrays the story from a subjective, Caitanya Vaiñëava point of view. Nevertheless, the principle here is not to belittle Nārāyaëa or

²⁹ *Caitanya-caritāmāta* (2.9.115-117)

defeat Rāmānuja's ontological understanding of God and his perception of the process to attain that supreme destination. Rather, Kāñēadāsa, following the tradition of the Six Gosvāmés of Vāndāvana and the *Bhāgavata Purāēa*, emphasizes the absolute nature of *rasa* that endures beyond God's majesty and celestial grandeur.³⁰ Indeed, that *rasa*, fully embodied in the personality of Kāñēa, governs the universe not by its subduing power but by its endearing sweetness, sweetness even God Himself cannot resist.

9. Conclusion

The eleventh-century South Indian philosopher and theologian Rāmānuja was the first thinker that seriously challenged the prevailing monism of the time. He argued for the personality of the ultimate reality, a personal God by the name Nārāyaēa, and eternal individuality of the living beings within that one reality. Being skilled in the art of scriptural exegesis, he was able to establish *bhakti* as a legitimate path that grants salvation, entrance into the eternal, majestic, and opulent abode of Lord Nārāyaēa. To establish his viewpoints, Rāmānuja predominately quotes from the Vedāntic sources and largely bypasses the earlier, often very emotional popular devotion of the Ālvārs. Mostly, Rāmānuja's *bhakti-yoga* is devotion guided by reason, an intellectual path of strict religious discipline. However, behind this overlay of rationality and logic, enclosed within there are also

³⁰ Interestingly enough, the son of Veī kaōa Bhaōōa, Gopāla Bhaōōa Gosvāmē later became one of the leading disciples of Caitanya. To Gopāla Bhaōōa Kāñēa manifested himself in the form of a beautiful Rādhā-ramaēa Deity, who is today worshiped in one of the main temples of Vāndāvana.

emotions and strong feelings for the Lord. In the words of the important nineteenth-century Caitanya Vaiñëava theologian, Bhaktivinoda Öhäkura (1838-1915), this was the tender budding stage of the eternal Vaiñëava-*dharma*

Vaiñëava-*dharma* is like a lotus flower gradually blossoming with the passage of time. First, comes the bud, slowly the bud begins to grow, and then the petals open in a breath-taking bloom, spreading their fragrance all around.³¹ (Öhäkura, 2004, 156)

As believed by the Caitanya Vaiñëavas, full fragrance and the pleasingly sweet quality of Vaiñëava-*dharma* manifest themselves completely in the figure of Caitanya. For him, spiritual emotions and not the reason or intellect, move the soul toward Kãñëa, the intimate supreme deity of the Godhead. This intimate love between a devotee, the subject of love, and Kãñëa, the object of love, is expressed in terms of sacred devotional rapture or *rasa*. Caitanya's learned followers, Rûpa Gosvãmé most notably among them, have later developed the concept of devotional love as *rasa* into a natural and yet intellectually appealing spiritual path.

Perhaps, as noted by Singer (2007, [online]), the very essence of literature might be the war between emotion and intellect, but as argued in this essay, one does not necessarily need to apply this model into the religious domain. Rather, I suggest steering of the head and the heart as one, both acting in compliance and friendly agreement with each other.

³¹ Chari (2000, 35) also "observed that Vaiñëavism as living monotheistic religion is very ancient going back to the Ägvedic times. It has developed itself and grown steadily through several centuries' right through the present day. Though it has assumed different forms in different periods, it is basically the same religion as it believes in the exclusive worship of Viñëu or any one of his manifestations such as Rãma, Kãñëa, Govinda, and Pãëouraì ga. (. . .) There may be differences in the external forms and observance of certain daily rituals including mode of worship to suit the conditions in the different regions. But the basic tenets of Vaiñëavism have remained the same".

One can see both of them, as *yogas*, depending on each other to connect a person with the supreme goal. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977), a modern-day Vaiñēava saint and a prominent communicator of Caitanya Vaiñēava philosophy and theology, makes a similar point as well.

Therefore, both the *yogas* are interdependent, as religion and philosophy. Religion without philosophy is sentiment, or sometimes fanaticism, while philosophy without religion is mental speculation. (Bhaktivedanta, 1986, 166)

It appears that in the Hindu religio-social setting orthopraxy or the correctness of religious practice, prevails over orthodoxy or the actual beliefs of the particular religious group. This becomes evident in how the two Vaiñēava traditions seek acceptance by the broader Hindu society. Sanskrit language, considered as superior form of expression, is chosen by both traditions as a medium of expressing and defending their convictions in front of the public. Even more so holds true in the case the *sampradāya* of Caitanya where the Caitanya Vaiñēavas take the form of an already existing structure (Mādhva *sampradāya*) to convey the substance — unique emotional expression of Kāñēa-*bhakti*. Does the substance, the eternal Vaiñēava-*dharma*, depend on the accompanied form, the temporary social setting? A topic for further research of emotional and/or intellectual *bhakti* may also be *sahajiyism*, esoteric cult centred in Bengal that sought religious experience through the world of the senses, specifically human sexuality. Although the various *sahajiyā* sects appear much earlier, it would be interesting to explore in what way this relatively new emphasis on emotions and feelings influenced their further development.

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