

## BHAKTI IN RELATION TO PRAPATTI

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### Bhakti and Prapatti: the two means of release

According to the Śrīvaiṣṇava religion and philosophy as explained by Yāmunācārya (A.D. 918–1028), Rāmānuja (A.D. 1017–1037) and others, liberation is possible not merely through *Karma* or *Jñāna* but through *Bhakti* or *Prapatti*. *Prapatti* is also known as *Śaraṇāgati*, *Nikṣepa*, *Nyāsa*, etc. The present paper is a reappraisal of the nature of these two means of *mokṣa* from the viewpoint of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* school as found in its Sanskrit sources.

### What is Bhakti?

*Bhakti* (from *bhaj* a first conjugational root, meaning 'to worship, to serve') is man's reaching out towards a fuller knowledge of God through calm meditation. It is often compared to the continuous flow of oil poured from one vessel to another.<sup>1</sup> But one has to distinguish *Bhakti* from mere emotionalism. *Bhakti* involves training one's will and intellect. According to Yāmuna, *Bhakti* results from a sincere practice of *Karma* and *Jñānayogas*.<sup>2</sup>

### Definitions of Bhakti

According to Nārada's *Bhakti Sūtras*, *Bhakti* is "deepest love for God".<sup>3</sup> According to Śāṅḍilya, *Bhakti* is "supreme attachment to the Lord."<sup>4</sup> According to the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, *Bhakti* is of the nature of "spontaneous outpour of love towards the object of one's desire."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Śrībhāṣya* under I.i.1. Published with English translation by V.K. Ramanujachari. Kumbakonam, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> See *Gītārthasaṅgraha*, v.1. Published with Vedānta Deśika's commentary by V.K. Ramanujachari. Kumbakonam, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bhaktisūtras of Nārada*, aphorism 2. Published by the Pāṇini Office, Allahabad: The Sacred Books of the Hindus, Vol. VII, part 1, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *The One Hundred Aphorisms of Śāṅḍilya*, aphorism 2. Published by the Pāṇini Office, Allahabad: The Sacred Books of the Hindus, Vol. VII, part 2, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> See *Bhaktiyoga*, p. 18. By G.C. Sen, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidyabhavan, 1959.

### Different aspects of Bhakti

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mentions "hearing, singing, remembering, adoring the feet, worshipping, prostrating, serving, befriending and offering one's self"<sup>6</sup> as the nine aspects of *Bhakti* by which one can approach God.

### The two types of Bhakti

The *Yatīndramatādīpikā* or Śrīnivāsa, (17th Cent.) the most authoritative manual of the Śrīvaiṣṇava school states that *Bhakti* can be of two categories depending upon how it is acquired. In some persons "Devotion" forms an innate trait as in Prahlāda, Śuka and Nammālyār. This *Bhakti* is known as *Phalabhakti* since it has already attained its fruition in those persons. But in a majority of persons, *Bhakti* can only be cultivated through a systematic and rigorous discipline. This kind of *Bhakti* is known as *Sādhana-bhakti*.<sup>7</sup> This type of devotion normally involves seven steps (*sādhana-saptaka*).

They are:

- (1) *Viveka*: By this is meant purification of the body by eating the right kind of food. What a man eats determines his thinking.<sup>8</sup>
- (2) *Vimoka*: This consists of disinterestedness in material things.
- (3) *Abhyāsa*: This is interpreted as constantly recollecting the fact that God is the ultimate basis and support.
- (4) *Kriyā*: This consists in doing the "five great sacrifices" (*pañcamahāyajñas*) as enjoined in the *Smṛti* texts. These, according to Manu are: (a) Teaching the sacred texts such as *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* to eligible people, (b) Offering libations to one's manes, (c) Worshipping gods through *homa* rites,

<sup>6</sup>See VII. 5. 23, 24. Published by the Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust. Manila, Philippines, 1982.

<sup>7</sup>*Yatīndramatādīpikā*, ch. 7. Translated into English by Swami Adidevananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1949.

<sup>8</sup>See *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, VII. 26. Found in the collection of *Principal Upaniṣads* by S. Radhakrishnan. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953. It is interesting to note that the *Bhagavadgītā* (XVII. 7-10) makes a threefold classification of food based upon the inherent quality of the person that eats it. The food liked by a person having the quality of *sattva* ('serenity') is that which is easily digestible, delicious, invigorating and promoting health, happiness and longevity. People under the influence of *rajas* ('activity') like certain foods which are bitter, sour, saltish, hot, pungent and scorching. These result in disease and misery. Those under the influence of *tamas* ('inertia') eat foods which are left over by others, which are tasteless, stinking and kept for a long time. For a further discussion on this topic see *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, published by Advaita Asrama, Calcutta, Vol. IV (1972), pp. 4-7.

- (d) Offering *bali* ('food') to birds and other creatures, and finally (e) Honouring guests and visitors.<sup>9</sup>
- (5) *Kalyāṇa*: This is explained as practising virtues such as truthfulness and compassion.
- (6) *Anavasāda*: This is to be understood as cheerfulness i.e., not losing one's heart even in the worst calamities.
- (7) *Anuddharsa*: This is non-exultation, i.e., not being overjoyed at times of prosperity or success in worldly activities. This is so because even excessive joy may sometimes stand in the way of one's spiritual progress.

### This kind of Bhakti is not for all

It is clear from a review of the above seven means of *Bhakti* that this path of "Devotion" is not open to one and all. Thus for instance, the fourth step mentioned above, viz., 'Kriya' consists of the performance of the "five great *yajñas*", of which "teaching the sacred texts" (*adhyāpanam*) is one. Obviously this cannot be done by one who does not belong to the three higher castes. By the same token, even women are not qualified to practise *Bhakti* in this manner.

This point needs clarification. The 'feeling' of *Bhakti* may be present in all individuals in some degree or other. But this cannot be called real *Bhakti*; it is only a semblance of it. Genuine *Bhakti* is that love and yearning for God which is incessant, continuous and all-absorbing. It is 'love for love's sake' which fills every moment of a devotee's life with tremendous thrill and bliss. Even if there be a moment's gap in this experience, the intensity of *Bhakti* becomes diluted and *Bhakti* becomes secondary. When the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* thinkers speak of 'cultivating' *Bhakti* through the seven *sadhanas*, they keep only that kind of *Bhakti* in view. Further, according to them, this method is open only to certain people having a particular family background and spiritual tradition. This however, does not mean that *Bhakti* is by its very nature 'restricted' in its appeal and application. For those who are outside the pale of the classes of people mentioned above, there are of course, other alternatives open to develop *Bhakti*, such as *Śravaṇa* ('listening to divine stories'), *Kīrtana* ('singing the glories of God') and the like, as mentioned in the *Bhāgavata* referred to earlier.

### Prapatti: synonyms and etymologies

It is in contradistinction from *Bhakti* and in total sympathy with all those who are not eligible to practise it that the path of *Prapatti* had been recommended by scriptures. The word *Prapatti* (*pra*, a preposition with root *pad* of the fourth conjugation) means 'falling down in pious resignation' or 'taking refuge

<sup>9</sup>See *The Laws of Manu*, III. 70. Translated into English by G. Bühler. Delhi: The Sacred Books of the East, 1967 (2nd Reprint).

with someone'. Its synonym, *Śaraṇāgati* is a compound of the two words *śaraṇa*<sup>10</sup> and *āgati*, meaning 'abode/protector' and 'coming for', respectively. Thus *Śaraṇāgati* means 'coming to an abode or saviour for refuge or protection'. Other words used in *Śrīvaiṣṇava* religious literature to denote *Śaraṇāgati* are: *Prapada-nam* (from *pad*, as for *Prapatti*), *Nyāsa* or *Bhara-nyasa* (from *as* a fourth conjugational root, meaning 'to throw' with prefix *ni-* ['down']), meaning 'throwing down one's weight', i.e., 'depositing one's burden with someone', *Nikṣepa* (from *kṣip*, a sixth conjugational root meaning 'to throw' with prefix *ni-* ['down']) or *Ātmanikṣepa*, also conveying the same sense.

### Humility, the hallmark of Prapatti

*Prapatti* is undoubtedly the heart of all religion. The grace of God requires humility on the part of the devotee. This humility is not what one may call the pathological humility which results from a morbid self-humiliation, but that humility which stems from the robust optimism that God is all and that God alone can do all.<sup>11</sup>

### Prapatti, an important tenet of Śrīvaiṣṇavism

It has to be mentioned in this context that *Prapatti* or *Śaraṇāgati* has become one of the cardinal tenets of the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* religion. The *Śaivasiddhānta* school no doubt recognises the spirit of total resignation at the feet of God but does not employ terms like *Prapatti* or *Saraṇāgati*. The *Tēvāram*<sup>12</sup> of Saint Tirunāvukkarasar (7th cent.) and the *Tiruvācagam*<sup>13</sup> of Saint Māṇikkavācagar (end of 8th cent.) use the term *āḍaikkalam* which is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit words *Prapatti* and *Śaraṇāgati*.

### Earlier references to Prapatti

The *Śrīvaiṣṇava* school draws its inspiration for this concept from the *Rgveda*, its *Khila* and the *Upaniṣads*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Gītā*. The *Rgvedic* passages under VII. 19.5, 6 are interpreted by the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* philosophers as indicating the doctrine of *Prapatti*. The word *svadhvara* therein is explained as a *prapanna*

<sup>10</sup> See *Amarakośa*, III. p. 208: "śaraṇam gṛha-rakṣitroh". N.S. Press, Bombay, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> See J.G. Plott, *A Philosophy of Devotion*, p. 141. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Tevaram*, IV. 81.8 Published by the Dharmapuram Adhinam, Dharmapuram, 1957.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Tiruvembāvai* 7, song 19. With the commentary of K. Subramania Pillai. Madras, 1955.

See in particular whole decade of *padigam* 24, which is known as "Āḍaikkalappattu".

The present writer is thankful to Dr. S.N. Kandaswamy for this information.

(one who has surrendered to God.).<sup>14</sup> The *Durgā Śukta* of the *Ṛgveda Khila* (X.127.12) has already expatiated the idea by its statement: “*Durgām devīm saraṇam abam prapadya*” (“I resort to goddess Durga for protection”), which is perhaps the earliest and the most explicit reference employing the roots of both terms *Śaraṇāgati* and *Prapatti*.

The *Kāthopaniṣad* says: “This Self cannot be attained by any amount of teaching or great intellect. It cannot be known even through wide learning. The Self reveals Itself to him whom the Self chooses. To him the Self reveals Its own nature.”<sup>15</sup> This, in other words, means that one who has wholeheartedly surrendered to God is alone favoured by God. This “election” by God is not to be interpreted as fostering fatalism or predestination, or even favouritism. It implies that the spiritual and ethical aspects of man are organically connected. Only one who is pure in heart can win the Grace of God.<sup>16</sup>

Like the *Ṛgveda Khila* passage quoted above, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* also makes an explicit statement on *Prapatti*, thus: “*mumukṣur vai śaraṇam abam prapadye*” (“To that God who is lighted by His own intelligence, do I, eager for liberation, resort for refuge.”) It may not be out of place to point out that it is the *Śvetāśvatara* that for the first time uses the term *Bhakti* in the sense of ‘loving devotion’ to God and to one’s spiritual teacher.<sup>18</sup>

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is popular among the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* religious philosophers as *Śaraṇāgatiśāstram*<sup>19</sup> (‘the Scripture that instructs in and highlights the Doctrine of Surrender’), especially for its episodes of Vibhīṣaṇa’s seeking refuge with Śrī Rāma<sup>20</sup> and of the latter’s pledge to protect anyone who sincerely surrenders to him but once.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup>See Vedānta Deśika’s *Nyāsavimśati*, verse 9. Published in *Stotrāṇi* by Śrī Vedānta Deśika Sempradāya Sabhā. Bombay, 1952.

<sup>15</sup>*Kāthopaniṣad*, I. 2. 23. This passage is common to the *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*, III. 2.3 also. Found in *Principal Upaniṣads*. London, 1953.

<sup>16</sup>*Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 620.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 748.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. *Śvetāśvatara*, VI. 23:  
“Yasya deve parā bhaktir  
Yathā deva tathā gurau” etc.

<sup>19</sup>See K.K.A. Venkatachāri. *Śrīvaiṣṇava Maṇipravāla*, p. 102. Bombay: Anantacharya Research Institute. 1978.

<sup>20</sup>See *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*, VI, 17.17. Critical Edition. Baroda: Oriental Institute 1971. “*Sarvaloka-śaraṇyāya rāghavāya mahātmane*” etc.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, VI. 18.33: “*Sakṛdeva prapannāya tavāsmi ca yācate*” etc.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* speaks of *Śaraṇāgati* or *Prapatti* in a number of places (II. 3; VII. 14; XV. 4; XVIII. 62), the most important and famous statement being “*sarvadharman parityajya mām ekam śaraṇam vraja*” etc., in XVIII. 66. This verse is popular in tradition as the “*Carama-sloka*” (literally, ‘the final verse’) since it spells out the “final” or “ultimate” (and unfailing) means of liberation, viz., *Prapatti*.

### The Ālvārs on Prapatti

The *Śrīvaiṣṇava* saints of Tamil Nāḍu, known as the Ālvārs have expressed *Śaraṇāgati* or *Prapatti* in a number of compositions. Apart from other hymns, one entire decade of Nammālvār’s *Tiruvāymoli* (VI. 10) is said to expound *Śaraṇāgati*.<sup>22</sup>

### Earlier Ācāryas on Prapatti

Rāmānuja wrote his *Śaraṇāgatigadya* bringing out the importance of *Śaraṇāgati*. Earlier, his grandteacher Yāmuna had expressed his preference for *Śaraṇāgati* in his *Stotraratna* (v.22).<sup>23</sup>

### The Limbs of Prapatti

The *Yatīndramatadīpikā* states that the act of *Prapatti* has six components (*aṅgas*) without which *Prapatti* is deemed to be incomplete.<sup>24</sup>

They are:

- (1) *Ānukūlyasya samkalpaḥ*: ‘seeking conformity with the will of the Lord’;
- (2) *Prātikūlyasya varjanam*: ‘Avoiding things opposed to the divine Will’;
- (3) *Rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāsaḥ*: ‘Supreme trustfulness that the Lord will save’;
- (4) *Goptrtvavarāṇam*: ‘Imploring the Lord to protect’;
- (5) *Ātmanikṣepa*: ‘Entrusting one’s self to the Lord, i.e., total dependence on the Lord’, and
- (6) *Kārpanyam*: ‘Assuming total meekness and humility in a spirit of absolute helplessness’.

<sup>22</sup>See also R. Dhandayudham. “Prapatti Neri”, *Ātmajothi*. Silver Jubilee Volume, Atmajothi Nilayam, Navalappitti, Sri Lanka (1973), pp. 68–70.

<sup>23</sup>For a brief exposition of this work, see M. Narasimhachary. “Śrī Yamunācārya’s Stotraratna”, *Jurnal Pengajian India*, Department of Indian Studies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Vol. 1 (1983), pp. 65–72.

<sup>24</sup>See ch. VII.

### The chief component of Prapatti

In some Śrīvaiṣṇava treatises we sometimes find the number of these *aṅgas* of *Prapatti* as five.<sup>25</sup> There is no contradiction here as much as the sixth limb mentioned above can be included in the fifth one itself as an adverbial conjunct. In any case, five are the essential constituents of *Prapatti*. Of these five again, the third one, viz., supreme faith (*mahāviśvāsa*) in the saviourship of the Lord is the sheet anchor of the whole concept of *Prapatti*, says Vedānta Deśika.<sup>26</sup>

### The Vaḍagalais on Prapatti

It is worth noting in this context that the two sects of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religion, known as the *Teṅgalai* ('Southern') and the *Vaḍagai* ('Northern') sects hold different views on the nature of *Prapatti*, as on other doctrines. The Northern school represented by Vedānta Deśika, for instance, treats *Prapatti* as an *aṅga* of *Bhakti*, coming as the culmination of the higher forms of *Bhakti*. That is, if one follows carefully the techniques of Devotion, one will be led to the point of abandon, of an ecstatic leap as it were, into that relation with God, wherein the conscious will is no longer active, but is overcome by the operation of Divine Will which replaces human will.<sup>27</sup> It becomes a "yoga" by itself initiated by the individual himself wherein there is no implication that the Lord is capricious in conferring undeserved grace on the human soul, and the danger of moral irresponsibility on the part of the *Prapanna*.

### The Teṅgalais on Prapatti

According to the Southern school represented by Pillai Lokācārya (a senior contemporary of Vedānta Deśika, 13th cent.), *Prapatti* is not only an easier way for those disqualified for *Bhakti*, but more or less, the *only way* for salvation. This school stresses total dependence on Divine Grace alone,<sup>28</sup> and states that human effort is useless and even a source of *ahaṃkāra* ('egotism'). As such, according to this school, the *Prapanna* is more or less exempt from all his normal obligations.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Nyāsavimśati*, v. 12.

<sup>26</sup> See Deśika's commentary on *Stotraratna*, verse 22. Edited by P.B. Annangaracharya. Kanchi, 1950.

<sup>27</sup> See *A Philosophy of Devotion*, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> The Southern school employs the analogy of "mārjāra — kiśora" ('the kitten') according to which the human soul should be completely at the mercy of God even as the kitten is at the mercy of its mother. The Northern school uses the analogy of "markaṭa — kiśora" ('the baby monkey') according to which one should do his own duty of clinging to God like the baby monkey which grasps tenaciously to its mother.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *A Philosophy of Devotion*, p. 238.

### Bhakti versus Prapatti

Be these views of the *Tengalais* and *Vadagalais* as they may, the difference between *Bhakti* and *Prapatti* cannot be ignored. "*Bhakti* is loving God with all the energy of one's own will. *Prapatti* is also loving God with all the force derived from God Himself when the aspirant has resigned his own will, placing all hope in God. For *Bhakti*, one needs incessant training and tuning one's will to devotional meditation on God, carefully watching against the slightest omissions in observance of all the steps in the most punctilious detail. In *Prapatti*, however, neither individual effort nor conditions of birth etc., are the criteria. Here the human soul wholeheartedly throws itself into the loving and caressing hands of God. In *Bhakti*, God is under no obligation to save the aspirant, whereas in *Prapatti*, He binds Himself to save. In *Bhakti*, untiring devotion and unceasing worship etc. on the part of the *jīva* are based on his own free will. In *Prapatti*, implicit trust and self-abnegation in tune with God's will alone are needed. *Bhakti* is a slender stream of love proceeding from the puny efforts a man is capable of producing in his heart. *Prapatti* on the other hand, is the mighty flood of grace pouring down from God. *Bhakti* requires working up with great personal effort. *Prapatti* brings down Divine Grace in a natural and spontaneous downpour."<sup>30</sup>

### The types of a Prapanna

The *Yatīndramatadīpikā*<sup>31</sup> states that even among the *Prapannas* there can be a twofold classification — those who are intent on the first three human ends viz., *Dharma* ('Righteousness'), *Artha* ('Wealth') and *Kāma* ('Love'), and those who want only *Mokṣa* ('Liberation'), the fourth and the most important human end. The former kind of *Prapanna* desires the three human ends from Lord Viṣṇu alone and from none else. The latter type of *Prapanna* is disinterested in the first three human ends, and through a qualified *guru* first performs *Prapatti* to Śrī or Lakṣmī the Divine Mother who is the 'mediator' (*Puruṣakāra*) between him and the Lord. Unable to follow other paths such as *Karma*, *Jñāna* and *Bhakti*, and feeling therefore, helpless and restless, he takes refuge with the feet of Lord Viṣṇu as the only means of salvation.

### Another classification

From another viewpoint, a *Prapanna* is of two kinds: the "one-pointed" (*ekāntin*) and the "extraordinarily one-pointed" (*paramaikāntin*). An *ekāntin* is one who seeks liberation as also other benefits from Lord Viṣṇu alone. In other words, for him other gods are simply of no account. A *Paramaikāntin* is one who does

<sup>30</sup>See A Govindacharya. *The Divine Wisdom of the Dravida Saints*, p. 206f. Madras: C.N. Press, 1902.

<sup>31</sup>*Cf.* ch. VIII, para 21.



not desire any fruit other than devotion and knowledge from the Lord Himself. This *Paramaikāntin* is again of two kinds: "a patient aspirant" (*dr̥pta*) and the "impatient aspirant" (*ārta*). The *dr̥pta* is one who experiences the fruits of his past *Karma* since they have to be exhausted after all, and can thus wait patiently for the casting away of the physical body. The *ārta* is one who is unable to wait any more after performing the *Prapatti*. For him, the worldly life is extremely unbearable and he feels like one engulfed by blazing flames."<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion it may be observed that the *Śrīvaiṣṇavas* attach great importance to *Prapatti* done first to Lakṣmī as the necessary prelude to the *Prapatti* done to Lord Viṣṇu. Rāmānuja's *Śaraṇāgatigadya*<sup>33</sup> which is held in high esteem for its treatment of *Prapatti* opens with a categorical declaration of wholehearted surrender to Śrī the Mother of the entire creation and consort of Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, para 22.

<sup>33</sup>See Rāmānuja's *Gadyatrāya* with Vedānta Deśika's commentary. Edited by P.B. Annangaracharya. Kanchi: 1953.