

Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya
- Introduction by Prof.K.T.Pandurangi

Chapter-I

Sri Madhvacharya considers Itihasa-Purana Prasthanas also as a source of Vedanta Philosophy along with Upanishad Brahmasutra and Gita Prasthanas. He gives utmost importance to Mahabharata as a source of Vedanta Philosophy and Vaishnava religion. This work helps the understanding of Vedanta Philosophy in two ways:

- 1) It contains all essential teachings of Vedanta Philosophy.
- 2) It helps to understand the purport of Veda and Upanishads.

It is well-said that itihAsapurANAbhyAM vedaM samupabR^iMhayet.h. While Vedas and Upanishads teach the theory of Vedanta, the Mahabharata teaches the practice through appropriate illustrations. Therefore, Sri Madhvacharya attaches great importance to Mahabharata.

For the utilization of Mahabharata, both as a source and as an aid to the exposition of Vedanta Philosophy, two undertakings were necessary:

- 1) To fix an authentic Text of Mahabharata.
- 2) To unearth the in-depth meaning of it going beyond the mere story, episodes, events, and the personalities.

That is to say, to identify the moral and spiritual issues behind the story, episodes, etc. It is this that is achieved in this work viz., Mahabharata Tatparyanirnaya.

The work is neatly planned. It contains thirty-two chapters and has 5202 verses. The first chapter, designated as sarvasastrArthanirNaya, contains the central teaching of Vedanta philosophy viz., vishhNusarvottamatva. The second, designated as suvAkyoddhAra, affirms the same. The third explains the creation outside and within the Brahmanda. It mentions the ten avatars of the Supreme God upto Sri Rama's avatara. Chapters 4 to 9 contain the entire summary of Sri Rama's avatara karya. The tenth chapter describes Vedavyasa avatara. The rest of twenty-two chapters give a gist of the entire Mahabharata. Some events and points of Harivamsha and Bhagavata are also included in these. Thus, Mahabharata Tatparyanirnaya is an exposition of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata, and Harivamsha. As stated earlier, it is an exposition of the entire Veda and Vedanta teachings. This work is not merely a gist of the above works but an evaluation of the moral and spiritual issues involved. Sri Madhvacharya, at the close of this work, records that he composed it under the instructions of Lord Narayana Himself.

nArAyaNenAbhihito badaryAM tasyaiva shishhyo jagadekabhartuH
(MBTN 32-157)

Sri Narayana Panditacharya declares in Madhva Vijaya that this work is a good guide to all God-loving persons.

itihAsapurANAbdheH bhavachchittAdriloDitAt.h |
j~nAtAM bhAratatAtparyasudhAM kaH san.h na sevate || 15-76||

The benedictory verse of Mahabharata Tatparyanirnaya viz., nArAyaNAya paripUrNaguNarNavAya, etc., gives the definition of the Supreme God Narayana given in the first and second sutras of Brahmasutras viz., guNapUrNatva and sR^ishhTyAdyashhTakartR^itva respectively. The first chapter, which is designated as Shastra Tatparya Adhyaya, contains the essence of the teachings of Vedanta Philosophy viz., Supremacy of God Narayana.

At the outset, the purpose of the creation and the process of the creation are explained. The creation is a kind of sport for the Supreme God. However, it serves the purpose of providing an opportunity for the jivas to have the full expression of their original nature by undertaking appropriate means. It also provides an opportunity for Goddess Lakshmi to assume her different forms.

so.ayaM vihAra iha me tanubhR^itsvabhAva
sambhUtaye bhavati bhUtikR^ideva bhUtyAH ||
(MBTN I-5)

The God desires that those who are devoted to Him should attain the prosperity of liberation, and to enable them to achieve this end, he undertakes creation.

bhUtyai nijAshrita janasya hi sR^ijyasR^ishhTau IxA babhUva |
(MBTN I-3)

First, he himself assumes the forms of Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha and makes Goddess Lakshmi assume the forms of Maya, Jaya, Krti, and Shanti. He creates by His Pradyumna form, protects by His Aniruddha form, destroys by His Sankarshana form, and liberates by His Vasudeva form.

Apart from these five forms (these and Narayana), He also assumes Keshava, etc. (twelve forms); Matsya, etc. (ten forms); Narayana, etc. (hundred forms); Vishva, etc. (thousand forms); Para, etc. (many forms), and Aja, etc. (infinite forms). He is only one though He assumes several forms. All his forms are Purna, i.e., full. He is impartite; there are no internal parts of Him. He has no Prakrta Sharira. He is absolutely free from any drawback. His body is that of bliss. He is Supreme and independent. He has no limitation of time and space. He has no growth or decay. None is equal or superior to Him. He is supreme. The Supreme God is introduced by such glowing tributes by Sri Madhvacharya at the very commencement of this work. This tempo is maintained not only all along this work, but in all his other works.

Sri Madhvacharya declares that this supremacy of Lord Narayana is proclaimed in all the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Pancharatna, and all other works that followed the tradition of these. He also states that this purport of the scripture is determined by the Brahmasutras. He quotes

from Veda, Upanishads, rahmasutras, Gita, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata a good many passages to substantiate the above features of the Supreme God.

We will notice only a few of them here:

1. nAsti nArAyaNasamaM na bhUto na bhavishhyati |
etena satyavAkyena sarvArthAn.h sAdhayAmyaham.h || (Mbh I-1-18)
2. yasmAt.h xaramatIto.ahamaxarAdapi chottamaH |
ato.asmi loke vede cha prathitaH purushhottamaH || (B.G.XV-18)
3. paro mAtrayA tanvA vR^idhAna | nate mahitvamashnuvanti | (R.V.)
4. neha nAnAsti kiJNchana | (Katha. III-4)
5. pR^ithagupadeshAt.h (B.S.I-3-28)

These quotations are incorporated in the very verses of Mahabharata Tatparyanirnaya. He is very emphatic that only such scriptures that declare the supremacy of Vishnu are authentic, and others are not authoritative. Such works that declare Shiva, etc. other than Vishnu as superior are intended to mislead the undeserving.

mohArthAnyanyashAstrANi kR^itAnyevAj-nayA hareH |

When the God assumes avatars in the mortal world, certain human drawbacks are displayed by Him. He pretends ignorance, he appears as having a human body, he appears to suffer from injuries and death, and he pretends to be in grief and without any self-control. All these are intended only to mislead the undeserving. There cannot be any drawbacks for Him who is supreme. The Brahmasutras give us the correct knowledge of Brahman, i.e., Vishnu. These declare that He is the same in all His forms, that is to say, He is guNapUrNa and nirdoshha in all His forms.

Sri Madhvacharya particularly points out that the Vedas declare the supremacy of Vishnu. He quotes a number of hymns of the Rg Veda and declares the supremacy of Vishnu. We will notice a few here.

1. asya devasya mILhushho vishhNoretasya prabhR^ithe havirbhiH |
(R.V. VII-40-5)
2. stuhi shrutaM gartamadaM puvAnam.h |
(R.V. II-33-11)
3. pradhAnvasya mahato mahAni satyAsatyasya karaNAni vocham.h |
(R.V. II-15)

4. satyaH so.asya mahimA gR^iNe shavo yaj-neshhu viprarAjye |

>From this, it is clear that those who hold the view that Vishnu is only a Puranic deity and not a Vedic deity are ignorant of the Vedas.

In order to bring home the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, Sri Madhvacharya mentions the fact that all others, i.e. all jivas right from Vayu, are pratibimbas of Vishnu, and they are in a hierarchical order.

AbhAsako.asya pavanaH pavanasya rudraH
sheshhAtmako pavana eva cha shakrakAmau |

Vayu is the pratibimba of the Supreme God. Rudra and Garuda are the pratibimbas of Vayu, and Indra and Kama are the pratibimbas of Garuda and Rudra. In this way, the line goes on upto R^ishhi, gandharva, etc. This is the line of purushas. The line of women commences with ramA and moves in the order viz., Sarasvati Bharati, Parvati, Suparni, and so on.

The jivas are divided into three types viz., muktiyogyA, nityasamsArin.h, and tamoyogyA. Under each category, there are innumerable jivas.

tasmAt.h samAptimapi yAnti na jIvasaN^ghAH |
Anantyaeva gaNasho.asti yato hi teshhAm.h ||

These jivas are distinct from the God. These are also mutually distinct. Both the God and jivas are distinct from the jadas. The jadas are also mutually distinct. Thus there are five principal categories of bheda-

jIveshayorbhidA chaiva jIvabhedaH parasparam.h |
jaDeshayorjaDANAM cha jaDajIvabhida tathA ||
paJNcha bheda ime nityA sarvAvasthAmu sarvashaH |
muktAnAM cha na hIyante tAratamyAM cha sarvada ||
(MBTN I-70,71)

The jiva attains liberation only by the grace of the God.

yamevaishha vR^iNute tena labhyaH... (MBTN I-77)

The grace fo the God is to be obtained by knowledge and devotion. The knowledge should contain the following ingredients:

1. sarveshhAM cha harirnityAM niyantA tadvashAH pare (MBTN I-79)

God is the regulator of all, and all are entirely dependent upon Him.

2. tAratamyAM tato j~neyaM sarveshitvaM haresthA | (MBTN I-80)

The God is supreme, and all others are inferior to Him in a hierarchical order.

3. paJNchabhedaMshcha vij~nAya vishhNoH svAbhedhameva cha | (MBTN I-81)

The five types of differences and the fact that there are no internal differences within the God should be known.

4. avatArAn.h harerj~nAtvA nAvatArA hareshcha ye | (MBTN I-82)

One should know which are the avatars of the God and which are merely aveshas.

5. sR^ishhTiraxA.ahR^itij~nAnaniyatyaj~nAnabandhanAn.h |
moxaM cha vishhNutastveva j~nAtvA muktirna chAnyathA || (MBTN I-82)

One can attain liberation by knowing the sR^ishhTyAdyashhTakartR^itva of the God. These are creation, protection, destruction, giving knowledge, regulation, causing ignorance, causing bondage, and bestowing liberation.

6. vedAshcha paJNcharAtrANi setihAsapurANakAn.h |
j~nAtvA vishhNuparAneva muchyate nAnyathA kvachit.h || (MBTN I-84)

One can attain liberation by knowing that Veda Pancharatra, Itihasa Purana, etc., the sacred literature, declares the supremacy of Lord Vishnu.

This enumeration of the ingredients of knowledge covers four important aspects:

1. vishhNusarvottamatva
2. jIvapAratanrya, jIvatAratamyA
3. paJNchabheda
4. sarvavedapratipAdyatva

This is exactly shAstratAtparyanirNaya, the theme of the first adhyaya.

Now, the above knowledge has to be accompanied by bhakti. The well-known definition of bhakti is given here:

mAhAtmyaj~nAnapUrvastu sudR^iDhaH sarvato.adhikaH |
sneho bhaktiriti proktastayA suktirna chAnyathA || (MBTN I-85)

The highest love of God that is accompanied by the knowledge of His supremacy is bhakti.

With the bhakti based on the firm knowledge of the glory of the God, one has to undertake upasana. Chaturmukhabrahma is eligible to meditate upon Lord Vishnu with all His attributes. The average muktiyogya men are eligible to meditate with only four attributes viz., sat, chit, Ananda, and Atma. This goes on, increasing according to each one's inner capacity and the position in the hierarchy.

While satvika jivas develop jnana and bhakti, the tamasa jivas develop dvesha, i.e. hatred for the God. anAdidveshhiNo daityAH |

The dvesha is expressed through the following perverted knowledge:

jIvAbhedo nirguNatvaM apUrNaguNatA tathA |
sAmyAdhikye tadanyeshhAM bhedastadgata eva cha ||

prAdurbhAvaviparyAsaH tadbhaktadveshha eva cha |
tatpramANasya nindA cha dveshha ete.akhilA matAH || (MBTN I-111,112)

The thought that the God and the jivas are identical, the God is without any attributes, He has only a limited number of attributes, some other gods are equal or even superior to Him, the God has internal differences (between His mularupa and avatara rupa and between His avayavas), His gunas are different from Him, His avataras have certain drawbacks, and such other thoughts are the forms of hatred of the God.

The bhakti practiced by the muktiyogyas should be free from this perverted knowledge (dvesha). Such pure bhakti will lead to aparokshajnana and prasada of the Supreme God. The Supreme God will bestow the liberation. Mukhyaprana will remove the subtle body.

vishhNurhi dAtA moxasya vAyushcha tadanuj~naya | (MBTN I-78)

Chaturmukhabrahma is the chief guru for all. A guru is one who possesses thirty-two features of a guru, who has no doubt in respect of right knowledge and who can remove the doubts of disciples.

shhaNNavatyaN^gulo yastu nyagrodhaparimaNDalaH |
saptapAdaH chaturhasto dvAtrimshairlaxaNairyutaH ||

asaMshayaH saMshayachchhid.h gururukto mavIshhibhiH |
tasmAd.h brahma gururmukhyaH sarveshhaMeva sarvadA || (MBTN I-121-122)

The thirty-two features are described as under:

paJNchadIrghaH paNchasUxmaH paJNcharaktaH paDunnataH |
tripR^ithustrishhu gambhIro dvAtrimshallaxaNastviti ||

The knowledge imparted by the guru possessing these features is true knowledge.

samyag.hIaxaNasampanno yaddadyAt.h suprasannadhIH |
shishhyAya satyaM bhavati tatsarvaM nAtra samshayaH || (MBTN I-124)

As stated above, Chaturmukhabrahma is the chief guru for all. However, other superior persons are also gurus in the respective order as per the features of a guru possessed by them. Sometimes, even lesser persons also may have to be taken as guru. They should also be duly respected.

anye.api svAtmano mukhyAH kramAd.h gurava IritAH ||

kramAllaxaNahInAshcha laxaNAIaxaNaiH samAH |(MBTN I-123)

svAvarANAM gurutvaM tu bhavet.h kAraNataH kvachit.h |
maryAdArthaM te.api pUjyA na tu yadvat.h paro guruH || (MBTN I-126)

A muktiyogya jiva will get rid of all his sins as soon as he has aparokshajnana of the Supreme God. The muktiyogya jivas journeying through the ArchirAdi path go to Chaturmukhabrahma and then reach Lord Hari.

The above tenets (including the ones given in previous postings) constitute the purport of the entire sacred scripture. Sri Madhvacharya informs that he has culled out these in the ShastratAtparya Chapter of this work under the instructions of Lord Hari Himself and closes this chapter:

iti R^ig.hyajuhSAmAtharvapaJNcharAtretihAsataH |
purANebhyastathA.anyebhyaH shAstrebhyo nirNayaH kR^itaH || 1\135||

vishhNvAj~nayaiva vidushhA tatprasAdabalonnateH |
AnandatIrthamuninA pUrNapraj~nAbhidhAyujA || 1\136||

tAtparyaM shAstrANAM sarveshhAM uttamaM mayA proktam.h |
prApyAnuj~nAM vishhNoretajj~nAtvaiva vishhNurApyo.asau || 1\137||

[sarvashAstratAtparyanirNayo nAma prathamoadhyAyaH]

