

THE CONCEPT OF LĪLĀ IN VIŚISTĀDVAITA

PHILOSOPHY

The Vedānta Sūtras describing the purposive nature of the world and its process say that all this world exists for the sake of Līlā: *Lokavattu līlā* . (II.i.33) God created the world for the sake of pure play. A little thought would reveal that this sūtra should mean that the purpose of the world – process. This interpretation seems to follow legitimately from the meaning of the word Līlā and it is, from the theistic point of view. The most satisfactory.

Let us for the sake of clear understanding enter into the inner and fundamental meaning of the word Līlā. It is usual to take it to mean mere sport, play, or grace. This at least is the ordinary dictionary meaning that we know of. It is in this manner that our greatest and most profound commentators of the above sūtra have taken it. We do not come across any other meaning in classical Sanskrit literature. Nor do we in Pāli and Prākṛt meet with any other meaning. Līlā accordingly means to us mere sport or play.

We do not come across this word Līlā in the Vedic or the up literature. It is usually presumed that every sūtra of bādarāyaṇa refers to a definite passage in the Upaniṣads. This particular passage however lies without any recognizable contextual hearing in the Upaniṣads. It is just possible to hold that there may be another word whose meaning bears the same intention as the word Līlā does. At any rate that word has not been quoted by our learned commentators.

Thus we are in a peculiar position of having to give this word a meaning that it apparently cannot bear because tradition is against any new construction or innovation. This, however, we are constrained to do because of the logical difficulties that follow the acceptance of the traditional meaning, difficulties that, alas for us, were not perceived by the learned scholars in Viśiṣṭādvaita thought.

The derivative meaning has to be considered as against the traditional. The word *Līlā* may be said to comprise of two roots: *Li and Lā*. As the *Amara Sudhā* puts it: *Liyamlātiti Līlā* (P.41) means clinging and *la* means grasping (*ādāne*). The combination of these two roots means accordingly the 'taking up of the clinging'.

In the śūtra-context only meaning that this can yield is that the souls which are eternally attached to God as his modes, as bodies, are lifted out of their suffering and restricted existence, in other words, are taken out and made perfect in evolution which is the *Līlā*. *Līlā* signifies this act of freedom giving by the Lord through evolutionary ascent. This is the final harmony to which the play of the Divine Love – consciousness moves. Thus the śūtra means that that world or rather in this world the purpose of the Divine, is exclusively for the play of the redemptive grace of the Lord. This and nothing else is the purpose of this creation; evolution exists as an expression of the perfect activity of the grace of God. The world exists for the Divine function of mercy or grace (*dayā*) as a constant act of acceptance by God of man who is entirely dependent upon Him.

The beauty of this interpretation consists in the supreme exposition it makes of the relation of the world, God and this emergence from subtle to gross manifestation of the world. It shews the theistic point powerfully. It focuses our attention on the purpose of life which is not only the full creative delight of Brahman but also that this creative delight of Brahman is at the same time the consoling power of redemption of the souls. If *Līlā* is taken to mean merely as a reduplicated stem of *La*, it means loving oneself or absorption of oneself in the world-process that this world should exist for the absorption of God into its process is meaningless or not worse.

There is yet another alternative and that is that this word *Līlā* is derived from the root (imaginary be it noted), *Lil*. This root is similar in Indo-Germanic language to the Greek root *Lil* derived from *lilaimai* (*Wörterbuch der Indo-German Sprachen*, AA. Fick, vol.1.0.187; Vol. 4.pg.220: *Griechische Grammatik*,

p.37). it means energy. From this word is derived the Ger. Lust and the psychoanalysts *libido*. (c.f. "Logic of Religious Thought " by Milburn, p.55). the play or energy concept is certainly at the bottom of our traditional meaning of Līlā. The important point to bear in mind is that it is not available in the derivative meaning of the word. In the derivative meaning we have it signifying an activity quite different from what we know as play. This energy or śakti concept is not alien to the upaniṣadic thought: but since we do not find the word Līlā in that connection there, and since we find it only in the sūtra under discussion, it is certain that it does not bear the traditional writers in this context. We cannot affirm, and it is certainly not our intention in this paper to affirm one way or the other, that this energy or śakti concept in Sanskrit is derived from a Greek root or from what philologists call the Indo-Germanic language.

It is only when we go to the yoga – conception of the word that we are in the presence of the concept of grace, and there is absolutely no reason why we should not choose this in preference to the meaningless, at least so far from our standard point, concept of mere play.

So far as to the word itself. But many thinkers may not feel called upon to accept this variation. The contention that I make of Sūtra is certainly provoking and far reaching in its implication. At least of much vehement controversy it will be the germ. Rāmānuja has not stated the same meaning directly or by implication in the context. The freedom of the individual as a purpose of the world's existence or in other words, that there is an ulterior or secondary motive other than the sheer enjoyment of the Divine is certainly not what any theist would accept. It would seem that once we grant that the world exists for the sake of individuals also, the whole statement that the Divine is purposeless, with respect to an end, fails. It seems to indicate that the Divine is not as perfect as may be desired since his creatures are imperfect. Further, that the Divine is not fully implicated in the creative process since the individuals are also in some sense construed as theological causes. The teleological cause of the world, it is contended, must be identical with the immanent causality in a growing or

evolving world. This fine immanency and purity of the Divine seem to be questioned by this peculiar construction. Brahman loses his pre-eminence. God further seems to be too deeply tied to the apron strings of the individual. If the freedom of the individual is the only question then there is no serious impediment to God's willing it. But there is no need to affirm that this world exists as purely for the Lord's play, and secondly there is no real contradiction in mentioning that the act of enjoyment of individuals.

The main reason for the contention that I here maintain apparently against the interpretation of Rāmānuja himself, that his not one the sūtra does not seem to bring out explicitly the full significance or hṛdaya of Bādarāyaṇa, not to speak of himself. If the word *kaivalya* is made to mean *kevala eva*, purely, then there is no need to alter the word in the manner in which it is put in. such a use of the word *kevala* is not ruled out even in its connection with the word *Līlā*. *Kaivalya* can only mean an independent sub-joined statement to the *Līlā* which is primarily that of the Lord. There can be no *kaivalya* to the Lord who is ever perfect, and is eternally free. In so far as the world is said to exist for *kaivalya* and *Līlā*, it can only mean that the world exists – for the freedom of the individual also. *Kaivalya* means *mokṣa* it does not mean purely.

If the word is to be significant in the sūtra and if Bādarāyaṇa is using the sūtra-style, unmistakable the word *kaivalya* has a deeper significance than the mere flat language implied in the word *kevalam*. Nor could the interpretation that *kaivalyam (kevalsya bhāvah kailvayam)* lead to the interpretation of the world as existing as pure creation. The purpose of this creation is not an exclusive matter for the enjoyment of Brahman since it also exists for the individuals absolutely inalienably related to Him. to say that it exists exclusively for His delight is to make the sūtras less significant than what it is.

On the other hand, when interpreted significantly we find that it expresses the truth that the world exists for the pure attainment of beatitude by the individuals who as yet lack it. the statement of Bādarāyaṇa, can only mean that

there is at the bottom of creation this double (ubhaya) purpose in the Līlā-word. The world exists not only for the delight of Brahman but also for the fruition of man; the world whilst it is on the one hand the līlā-vibhūti of the Divine, is, on the other, the karma – bhūmi of the individuals. Rāmānuja in his Śaraṇāgati – gadya Vedānta Deśika in his Dayā Śataka in trying to canvass graciousness and love of God show that God is not cruel at all in having created this world, apparently full to the brim with pain and suffering, where no perfect goodness can be bad at all, which seems to be the grinding mill that grinds slowly though surely, making life a burden and earth a machine of relentless justice and cruelty. They on the contrary, affirm that the act of evolution was undertaken from a bounteous mercy (*dayā*) and love for the ignorant souls wallowing in dirt and confusion, since He cannot see them even for a mean suffering.

The world is thus a product of love and mercy, a constant force of love and delight; and He in thus manifesting love sustains its evolution; and thus the real cause of the world manifestation is Love-volition *icchā* of the Īśvara. The loneliness of the Divine was just the result of the absolutely helpless and hapless state of the individuals in praḷaya. Whether it be in the sense of sympathy and love for the clinging creatures or in the sense of aesthetic feeling to manifest His own splendid glories and delight, the one fact that stands out clearly is that both of them are identical. Free from the influence of any lack of perfection, free certainly from cruelty of being the cause of misery of the individuals, the Divine creates or brings into being this *prakṛtic* world for the delight of His mercy, and as the purest efflorescence of His infinite and abiding Love. In this consist the supreme mystery of the Līlā, of the Divine play if we yet want to use the traditional notion. It is in this sense which is more deep than what most people assume in order to prove the non-purposiveness of the Divine in creating the world with regard to an external end that the world exists as the finest and purest expression of the Divine Līlā of redemptive efficacy.

Nor is Līlā a word that means unpurposeful play. It is an enjoyment of the manifestation of Sympathy and Love. Nor is it one-sided. It is love that enfolds the bestower and the bestower in an ecstasy of Union. The implicitness of the word

Līlā are so manifest in a philosophy of Bhakti and metaphysics of Organicism that they ought not to be brushed aside simply because Rāmānuja has not stated in so many words in a particular context the full import or purport of *exclusive* enjoyment on the part of the Divine. For the Lord, the greatest aim, if we may so say, is to make the souls lime himself, lead them onto the fullest expression of their spiritual being. this is the taking up of the clinging, the leading the depend, the *liyam lāti iti: līlā*.

The world thus exists truly for God as well as man, being an outcome of the Divine Mercy who in His Līlā achieves for the individual a perfection of his own nature. The natural expression of Love is perfect appreciation and creation; and if one does not see this creative play-aspect of the Divine outpouring of Love and Sympathy that is beauty, the word Līlā loses much of its meaning, and becomes sadistic in its import. The world would be just a kind of burning Rome and God an Archetypal Nero. Rāmānuja at least and Vedānta Deśika recognize this fact so clearly that one misses the truth if one merely holds that the world exists for the sake of pure Līlā (kevala eva Līlā) of God without any further implication. In making the world a field at once for the fruition and liberation of the individuals through the fulfillment of the karmas that fall to their lot, and for the undoing of the results of the past karma, the Divine gives ample scope for the most responsibility of the individual, of the expansion of the intelligence that has been terribly contracted by prior ignorant actions.

In this connection it may be said that even the Upaniṣads speak of the individual souls as enjoyers. “Two birds, related to each other as (inseparable) friends are sheltered on the same tree. One of them eats sweet fruits, while the other looks on without eating. Man attached to the same tree is deluded and grieves through want of power and correct knowledge. When he sees the other the adored lord and His glory he becomes free from grief. “He attains to perfect equality with the Divine, says the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads (III. 1-4). Man then finds that the Para, the supreme Lord is his own inner self immortal. He “finds joy in the Self, his love goes to the self and he becomes active.” Thus in the taking up of the individual self who is inseparably related to Him the supreme Brahmanis

actually leading him to the fullest exercise of his intelligence in the service of the Divine. This is the meaning of the word active.

Nor should it be thought for a moment that the world does not exist of the individuals also. Bādarāyaṇa, whom tradition identifies with vyāsa, states in the *Mahābhārata* Anuśāsana parva, that the world exists for the enjoyment of the individuals also. “Know, O Keśava, that this all consisting of animate and inanimate existence with Heaven and other unseen entities which condense in these three worlds and which has all pervading Lord for its soul, has flowed from Mahera and has been created by him for the enjoyment of the Jiva.” (XIV.206)

Līlā exists then as the active principle of Dayā about which Vedānta Deśika exquisitely sings. And kaivalya is the freedom of the individuals that results from such an expression of Dayā by the Lord. The world is the place where such a fulfillment and fruition and expression is possible for it is the perfect instrument of the Lord. In this sūtra then in a pregnant and utterly stating manner Bādarāyaṇa introduces the secret of the Unit of the *cidacidviśiṣṭa* Brahman.