

THE QUESTION OF THE UNITY OF *KARMAKĀṆḌA* AND *JÑĀNAKĀṆḌA* ACCORDING TO RĀMĀNUJA

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Beginning with Rāmānuja (dated traditionally 1075-1140 CE), thinkers of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta occupied themselves with the question of *aikaśāstrya*. If we look at the term without resorting to how it is used by Viśiṣṭādvaita thinkers, we can presume that it conveys both the idea of particular theoretical considerations focused on a specific single aim and the idea of one branch of knowledge formed as a single composition. This issue seems to be particular to the Viśiṣṭādvaita branch of the Vedānta and comes up in its discussion with Advaita Vedānta. The subject of enquiry in this paper will be what exactly is communicated by this notion in early Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. At this point it can be assumed that the term relates in particular to Viśiṣṭādvaita orthopraxy. One thing is, however, certain: this unity, given the name *aikaśāstrya*, is not, according to the thinkers of the school, to be taken as the unity of equally important theoretical considerations undertaken with regard to the Veda.

Rāmānuja is the first thinker to introduce the principle of *aikaśāstrya*, which he discusses with the support of an injunction from Taittirīyāraṇyaka 2.15: “the learning of one’s own Veda is to be undertaken”¹.

In the Śrībhāṣya, Rāmānuja introduces the problem when discussing BSū 1.1.1, after having explained the meaning of the word *jijñāsā* in the *sūtra athāto brahmajijñāsā* (“And hence then the desire to know *brahman*”). The stimulus for the following discussion is the word ‘then’ (*ataḥ*) appearing in the *sūtra*. Rāmānuja, in order to provide a starting point for the argumentation, quotes a brief statement of Bodhāyana: “The desire to know *brahman* comes immediately after the knowledge of (ritual) acts is completed.”² Bodhāyana’s terse statement is rather ambiguous. Should the knowledge that is mentioned be restricted to getting acquainted with the obligations of a particular religious practice, i.e., with acquiring some amount of knowledge of ritual, of the ritual’s *praxis* present within one’s own

¹ TĀ 2.15: *svādhyāyo ’dhyetavyaḥ*.

² Śrībh₁ 50,1: *vṛttāt karmādhigamād anantaraṃ brahmavividiṣā*.

tradition? Or should it also embrace the theory developed with regard to this practice? In other words, should this knowledge mean exclusively the awareness of one's religious obligations, or should it include, as well, the theoretical analysis of the aims and results of the fulfillment of these duties, as developed in Pūrva Mīmāṃsā?

Without clarifying this point, Rāmānuja argues that due to the fact that acts (probably religious acts and duties known from Pūrva Mīmāṃsā) give temporary and inconsequential (minor) results, one should strive to know *brahman* immediately after the acquisition of the knowledge of acts. This assertion is in accordance with Bodhāyana's statement quoted above. The knowledge of *brahman* is that which produces infinite and lasting results for he who desires to be liberated.³ It is not specified in the passage whether the knowledge of acts is equivalent to becoming acquainted with commands concerning the question as to which ritual acts and duties are to be performed, or whether it should include the theory of these performed acts as well. At this point it is difficult to resolve whether Rāmānuja refers here to the practice of ritual or to the theory of ritual as well.

Having established the chronological order of studies, Rāmānuja introduces the idea of *aikaśāstrya*. This idea is propounded in accordance with Bodhāyana as well. Referring to Bodhāyana, Rāmānuja states that he wants to propound the *aikaśāstrya* of Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā by the following statement: "The Śārīraka (i.e., the Vedāntasūtras) is joined to the Jaiminīyasūtras, which is [therefore] characterized by sixteen chapters, thus the fact of *aikaśāstrya* is established."⁴

As we know, the Jaiminīyasūtras have twelve chapters, and the Vedāntasūtras four. From this statement one might understand that the Vedānta- and the Jaiminīyasūtras formerly formed a single unit, and that Bodhāyana commented upon a compositional unity consisting of two parts. Having found support in Bodhāyana's opinion, Rā-

³ Śrībh₁ 49,21-50,1: *mīmāṃsāpūrvabhāgajñātasya karmaṇo 'lpāsthiraphalatvād uparitanabhāgāv aseyasya brahmajñānasyānantākṣayaphalātvaḥ ca pūrvavṛttāt karmajñānād anantaraṃ tata eva heto[r] brahma jñānavyayaṃ ity uktam bhavati.*

⁴ Śrībh₁ 50,1-2: *vakṣyati ca karmabrahmamīmāṃsāyor aikaśāstryaṃ – 'saṃhītam etacchārīrakaṃ jaiminīyena ṣoḍaśalakṣaṇeṇeti śāstraikatvasiddhiḥ' iti.*

mānuja proceeds to explain the division of the Mīmāṃsā into Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā. He argues that this division and, as a consequence, the resulting difference between the two is based upon the difference of the subject matters discussed. From the way Rāmānuja asserts his position on this question, one can conclude that the division into two Mīmāṃsās is based on the order of the topics discussed.⁵ From the way the argumentation develops, one might gather that Rāmānuja's principle of *aikaśāstrya* does not contain so much the suggestion of ideological unity of the two Mīmāṃsās, but rather an idea of a certain chronological sequence in the study of the two, that is, the study of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā should come first and the study of Uttara Mīmāṃsā should follow. It seems that Rāmānuja wants to show that the affinities between the two Mīmāṃsās are more important than the differences, and that the differences originate more in the development of the theoretical reflection present in both schools. It is also probable that the idea of Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā having a single aim of theoretical consideration, of being one branch of knowledge and at the same time of being one composition, became on one hand a theoretical justification and support for the orthopraxy of the school of Rāmānuja (which, as we know, embraces both ritual acts and meditation), and on the other served the purpose of placing Viśiṣṭādvaita within the Hinduistic orthodoxy of that period⁶.

In my opinion it is also possible that the *aikaśāstrya* principle implies that the bulk of the Veda is a single unit, which was commented upon by Jaimini and Bādarāyaṇa, who interpreted it from their own different perspectives. The principle of *aikaśāstrya* seems to contain the implicit idea of understanding the Veda as a depository safeguarding both the knowledge of *brahman* and the knowledge of religious duties. In this way, the comprehensiveness of the Veda, which teaches both the nature of *brahman* and the nature of the religious acts, would also be the basis and the reason to regard the two Mīmāṃsās as a unit. Their theoretical considerations pertain to a single object, i.e., the Veda, understood as a code of both spiritual

⁵ Śrībh₁ 50,2-4: *ataḥ pratipipādayiṣitārthabhedena ṣaṭkabhedavad adhyāyabhedavac ca pūrvottaramīmāṃsayor bhedaḥ. mīmāṃsāsāstram 'athāto dharmajijñāsā'* (BSū 1.1.1.) *ityārabhya 'anāvṛttis śabdād anāvṛttis śabdāt'* (BSū 4.4.22), *ity evam antaṃ saṅgativīṣeṣeṇa viśiṣṭakramam.*

⁶ OBERHAMMER in this volume, pp. 48f.

knowledge and religious practice that one is to adopt as a whole in order to safely proceed on the path to liberation.

This position is obviously different than the opinion of the followers of Advaita Vedānta. Śaṅkara, in his commentary on the same BSū 1.1.1, when answering the objection as to whether in the case of this *sūtra* there is a special issue of antecedent knowledge of religious acts, explicitly states that: “This is not the case, because for he who has read the Vedānta there is a possibility of investigation into *brahman* even before [his] investigation into religious duty.”⁷

We see thus, that between Rāmānuja and Śaṅkara there is an important difference in the approach to the theoretical question regarding the two Mīmāṃsās. Both positively state their own divergent positions, though it is only Rāmānuja, who finds support for his position in the view of Bodhāyana, the earlier commentator. We also see that for Rāmānuja the principle of *aikaśāstrya* presupposes a given chronological sequence in the study of the two Mīmāṃsās. The sequence follows from acknowledging the fact that different results are achieved and effected if one studies either Pūrva or Uttara Mīmāṃsā. One is tempted now to reconsider either the understanding of the very term Pūrva Mīmāṃsā or the reflection concerning the *aikaśāstrya* principle in Rāmānuja’s thought. The fact that Pūrva Mīmāṃsā precedes Uttara Mīmāṃsā does not seem, for Rāmānuja, to suggest the necessity to deal with the exegesis of the Veda in order to finally focus on the ritual injunctions. Neither does it seem to play a role in the study of the Veda. A probable conclusion is that here, Rāmānuja understood Pūrva Mīmāṃsā differently. It seems to be taken more as the knowledge of religious acts and obligations practiced with a purpose different from that which is advocated and supported by the theoreticians of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. It will be explained later how exactly one should understand this purpose. It also seems feasible that the *aikaśāstrya* principle is used as a helpful device to establish a theoretical connection between the two Mīmāṃsās, probably in order to place Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta within orthodox Hinduism, which could be taken as an indication of a more orthodox post-Vedic Vaiṣṇavism⁸.

⁷ BSūBh 4,18-19: *na. dharmajijñāsāyāḥ prāg apy adhītavedāntasya brahmajijñāsopapatteḥ.*

⁸ See also OBERHAMMER in this volume, pp. 38f.

Śaṅkara, however, admits the possibility to discard the study of *dharma*, and for him the word “then” (*ataḥ*) in the *sūtra* 1.1.1 refers to a particular precondition for the study of Uttara Mīmāṃsā required from a pupil. This precondition is the ability to discriminate between the eternal and the non-eternal effects of one’s actions. The discrimination depends upon the aptness of the pupil, and if he knows and understands the difference between the eternal and the non-eternal results of his acts, he does not need to study *dharma*: “The discrimination between eternal and non-eternal objects, the non-attachment to the enjoyment of objects both now and hereafter, the acquisition of tranquility, restraint and other prerequisites as well as the desire for liberation [should come before the investigation into *brahman*]. If these conditions are present, one may successfully investigate *brahman*, regardless if he already has or does not have knowledge about *dharma*.”⁹

In the light of Śaṅkara’s commentary, the position of Rāmānuja becomes more obvious for us. We can rather safely assume that for Rāmānuja the principle of *aikaśāstrya* presupposes the study of the *karma*- and the *jñānakāṇḍa* of the Veda teaching taken as a whole, as well as the indispensability of observing their chronological order.

An interesting point to notice concerning the principle of *aikaśāstrya* is that Rāmānuja comes close to the position of Śaṅkara with regard to the effects of the performance of religious duties (connected to the *karmakāṇḍa*) and the investigation into the nature of *brahman* (connected to the *jñānakāṇḍa*). Both Rāmānuja and Śaṅkara make a clear-cut difference between the effects of the performance of religious acts and duties and the effects of the enquiry into *brahman*, and they both classify the effects achieved by the study of the two according to their rank of importance.

Yet Śaṅkara, having indicated the distinction between eternal and non-eternal objects, does not say where this discrimination should come from. Judging from his next statement, Śaṅkara seems to aim more at the individual discrimination of the adept. The knowledge that the theory and practice of the *karmakāṇḍa* are of lesser im-

⁹ BSūBh 5,5-8: *nityānityavastuvivekaḥ, ihāmutrārthabhogavirāgaḥ, śamadamādisādhanasamṣpat, mumukṣutvaṃ ca. teṣu hi satsu prāg api dharmajjñāsāyā ūrdhvaṃ ca śakyate brahma jijñāsituṃ jñātuṃ ca, na vīparyaye.*

portance does not, according to Śaṅkara, come from getting acquainted with both the *karmakāṇḍa* and the *jñānakāṇḍa*. He seems to suggest that this knowledge arises when the adept has become spiritually qualified, in order to clearly distinguish between the religio-ritualistic aspects of the Vedānta tradition, which are of lesser importance, and the spiritual aspect, the importance of which is fundamental. The conditions enumerated by Śaṅkara that are to be fulfilled before one embarks on the enquiry into *brahman* are certainly connected with achieving a certain level of individual spiritual accomplishment.

Rāmānuja, on the other hand, considers it necessary to study first religious acts and duties of one's *varṇāśrama* in order, it seems, to become acquainted with one's own religious tradition. Only this tradition gives safe footing to the adept and allows him to properly understand the connection and interrelation of religio-ritualistic and spiritual aspects of his tradition in order to subsequently and safely follow the path of spiritual development and finally that of liberation. Curiously enough, in the passage concerning the *aikāśāstrya*, we do not find an indication that would allow us to think that it means one must study Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. Yet one is tempted to ask: what exactly is to be studied, and how is it to be done?

Rāmānuja begins to explain his position regarding this matter with the help of the injunction "the learning of one's own Veda is to be undertaken" from Taittirīyāranyaka 2.15. It is worthwhile to dwell upon the notion of *svādhyāya* that appears in this particular injunction. Rāmānuja explains that: "In this way first, indeed, the very [word] 'studying' in the precept 'one is to study one's *svādhyāya*' prescribes the learning of the collection of sounds denoted by the word '*svādhyāya*', which are known as the 'Veda'."¹⁰

From this statement one understands that *svādhyāya* means the acquirement of the Veda. It is not a very illustrative explanation, as it is hardly believable that a pupil should acquire the whole bulk of tradition known under the denomination of the "Veda." In the explanation that follows, Rāmānuja specifies who can undergo this learning and in which moment of his religious training. It becomes clear that

¹⁰ Śrībh₁ 50,4-6: *tathā hi – prathamam tāvāt 'svādhyāyo 'dhyetavyaḥ', ity adhyayanenaiva svādhyāyaśabdavācyavedākhyākṣararāśer grahaṇam vidhīyate.*

svādhyāya concerns eight-year old Brahmin boys who, having undergone the ceremony of initiation, having prepared for learning the Veda, and having become fit for the study also by instructions with regard to particular religious practices (*vrata*), together with particular fixed rules and obligations (*niyama*), are taught the incantation-hymns (*chandās*) for a period of four and a half months¹¹.

The questions remain, however, what is being learned, what is the method of the training and what is its purpose? Unfortunately, one cannot find many direct indications regarding these questions in the given passage of the Śrībhāṣya, which is somehow understandable as they are more a question of religious practice. Some answers can be found in the following passage: “In this way the learning of the boy who is competent in particular religious practices (*vrata*) and in particular fixed rules and obligations (*niyama*) and who is initiated by a teacher, himself an expert in the Veda endowed with virtues of the soul, devoted to virtuous conduct, and of a good lineage of teachers, is understood to be the result of receiving the collection of sounds, [the result] having the form of articulating the words uttered by the teacher.”¹²

Now one can see that what the pupil is to learn is limited to that which is transmitted to him by an *ācārya*, a depositary of a particular tradition. In a recent edition of the text of Śrībhāṣya with a contemporary commentary by CHAKRAVARTY ACHARYA SWAMY¹³ one finds an interesting explanation of what *svādhyāya* means: “[A doubt] is to be conclusively dispelled if the word *svādhyāya* expresses the learning of one’s own branch of the Veda, which is related to one part [of it] (*ekadeśa*), or the learning of some other branch of the Veda. It has been said accordingly that there should be learning of one’s own branch of the Veda, which is acquired by tra-

¹¹ Śrībh₁ 50,6-8: *tac cādhyayanam kimrūpaṃ katham ca kartavyam ity apekṣāyām, ‘aṣṭavarṣam brāhmaṇam upanayita’, ‘tam adhyāpayet’ ity anena, ‘śrāvanyām prauṣṭhapadyām vā upākṛtya yathāvidhi | yuktaś chandāmsy adhyāyita māsān vipro ’rdhapañcamān’ (Manu 4.95). ityādi-vratānyamaviśeṣopadeśaiś cāpekṣitāni vidhīyante.*

¹² Śrībh₁ 50,8-10: *evam satsantānaprasūtasadācārāniṣṭhātmaguṇopetavedavidācāryopanitasya vratānyamaviśeṣayuktasya ācāryoccāraṇānūcāraṇarūpaṃ akṣararāśigrahaṇaphalam adhyayanam ity avagamyate.*

¹³ ŚrībhBhC.

dition, [learning] which is done in proper sequence and completely.”¹⁴

With the help of the modern commentary, that undoubtedly presents orthodox ideas, one may draw the conclusion that *svādhyāya* must have always meant the learning of the Veda texts connected to one’s own tradition. According to CHARLES MALAMOUD (1977: 45-50), who studied the sense of the term *svādhyāya* in the Taittirīyāraṇyaka, from which the injunction referred to by Rāmānuja comes, the whole Brahmanical tradition, particularly the one connected to Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, understood the sense of the word *svādhyāya* in a special way. The reflexive *sva* in *svādhyāya* does not refer to one particular person nor oneself. It refers to the group belonging to a Vedic *śākhā* that adheres to its own texts and their interpretation, of which group the person is a member. The entire injunction *svādhyāyo ’dhyetavyaḥ* should be read as: one is to learn the texts of one’s own *śākhā*, of the Vedic school to which one belongs¹⁵. To my knowledge, one cannot learn from Rāmānuja himself which Vedic texts should be memorized by adherents of his school. Of course Rāmānuja quotes different sources and in that way one can indirectly see which Vedic texts were important for him.

In Rāmānuja’s thought, *svādhyāya* probably acquired a different sense than its understanding in the Mīmāṃsā. When one considers the aim of this practice one realizes that *svādhyāya* was supposed to be undertaken with a different, yet clearly defined attitude. This is what one can learn from Rāmānuja: “And the learning is a preparatory purifying act (*saṃskāra*) of the learning of one’s own *śākhā*, since in [the injunction] ‘the learning of one’s own Veda is to be undertaken’ the study of the texts of one’s *śākhā* is understood as an obligatory act (*karman*).”¹⁶

One notices that Rāmānuja takes *svādhyāya* to be an obligatory act with a certain purifying function. What should this purification

¹⁴ ŚrībhBhC 19,7-8: *anena svasākhāikaadesasya śākhāntarasya vā svādhyāyaśabdavācyatvam api nirastam. tathā ca paramparāprāptāyāḥ svasākhāyā yathākramam kārtsnyenādhyayanam kartavyam ity uktam bhavati.*

¹⁵ MALAMOUD 1977: 46: “il faut apprendre le texte de sa propre Śākhā, de la branche védique à laquelle on appartient.”

¹⁶ Śrībh1 50,10-11: *adhyayanam ca svādhyāyasamskāraḥ, ’svādhyāyo ’dhyetavyaḥ’, iti svādhyāyasya karmatvāvagamāt.*

consist of? Here is an answer: “This preparatory purifying act is namely the causation of the suitability for another thing to be done. It is correct to say that the learning of the Veda of one’s *śākhā* is a purifying act, because it (i.e., the learning of the Vedas) informs [us] of both the four goals of the human, i.e., the religious duty (*dharma*), wealth acquisition (*artha*), fulfillment in love (*kāma*), liberation (*mokṣa*) and about things leading to these [four goals]. It is also because [*svādhyāya*] leads to these [goals] by its own nature by means of recitation, etc.”¹⁷

This passage explains quite clearly the function of *svādhyāya* in Rāmānuja’s thought. The learning of the Vedic texts of one’s own *śākhā* is both informative and efficacious. It is informative in so much as it indicates the possible ways to realize one’s life. It is also in itself a religious act, probably a pious act practiced with the belief that it brings, just of itself, desired effects to anyone who practices it, and is an infallible basis for further spiritual development and practice. It seems to be a necessary preparatory stage for the further stage of acquiring the knowledge of *brahman*. *svādhyāya* need not, or even must not be done in order to interpret the sense of the Veda logically or intellectually. Quite the opposite is the case. It is done in order to make the adept receive the entirety of the spiritual and religious tradition, to transfer upon him the memory of the tradition, a substratum that is for further guidance reliable in itself.

In this manner Rāmānuja ends the discussion of the question of *svādhyāya*. He sums up his point of view in the following manner: “In this way the prescription to study [the Veda] amounts to a mere acquisition of the collection of sounds [called the Veda] which are the *mantras* and which are [prescriptions of] what one should do.”¹⁸

The *svādhyāyavidhi* is clearly interpreted here to mean the necessity to memorize the two portions of the Veda, namely the *mantras* and the prescriptions regarding one’s religious duty. In this manner one becomes qualified, as Rāmānuja further explains, to ac-

¹⁷ Śrībh₁ 50,11-12: *samskāro hi nāma kāryāntarayogyatākaraṇam. samskāryatvaṃ ca svādhyāyasya yuktam, dharmārthakāmamokṣarūpapuruṣārthacatuṣṭayatatsādhanāvabodhitvāt; japādīnā svarūpeṇāpi tatsādhana-tvāc ca.*

¹⁸ Śrībh₁ 50,13: *evam adhyayanavidhir mantravan niyamavad akṣararāśigrahaṇamātre paryavasyati.*

quire the knowledge of purposeful things (*prayojanavato 'rthān*), because it is the Veda itself that imparts this knowledge upon man. Therefore he who acquired the memory of the tradition in the form of particular texts of one's own *śākhā* is capable to actualize those purposeful things in one's own life. He is enabled to turn, by his own accord (*svayam eva*), to the 'hearing' (*śravaṇa*) of the (Brahma) Mīmāṃsā, which takes the form of the reflecting upon the (key) statements (*mahāvākyas*) of the Veda, the result of which should be the ascertainment of a particular mode and nature (*svarūpaprakāra*) of those purposeful things¹⁹, a term that seems to imply an enquiry into the nature of *brahman*. It has become unambiguous now that the term 'Mīmāṃsā' refers here rather to Vedānta than to Pūrva Mīmāṃsā.

It is only at this point that one becomes entitled to turn to the study of Uttara Mīmāṃsā: "There [in the Veda], when the nature of the injunction to perform religious acts has been ascertained, and when the insignificant and impermanent [nature] of the acts have been perceived, and due to an instantly apparent (*āpāta*) and clear ascertainment of a durable and eternal effect, which is immortality, [which ascertainment is obtained from] the Upaniṣadic statements, occurring in the same part of the Veda of one's own Vedic tradition acquired by learning, one becomes qualified to study Uttara Mīmāṃsā, which has the form of the inquiry into the Upaniṣadic statements, the result of which is the ascertainment of this [immortality]."²⁰

The most interesting aspect of this quotation is the stress put upon the necessity to study first those parts of the Veda that teach the duties, through which one acquires the understanding of the effect of their performance. Without this clear apprehension of the result of

¹⁹ Śrībh₁ 50,13-16: *adhyayanagrhitasya svādhyāyasya svabhāvata eva prayojanavadarthāvabodhitvadarśanāt, grhitāt svādhyāyād avagamyamānān prayojanavato 'rthān āpātato dṛṣṭvā tatsvarūpaprakāraviśeṣanirṇayaphalavedavākyavicārarūpamīmāṃsāśravaṇe 'dhītavedaḥ puruṣaḥ svayam eva pravartate.*

²⁰ Śrībh₁ 50,16-18: *tatra karmavidhisvarūpe nirūpīte karmaṇām alpāsthiraphalatvaṃ dṛṣṭvādhyayanagrhitasvādhyāyaikadeśopaniṣadvākyeṣu cāmṛtatvarūpānantasthiraphalāpātapratītes tan nirṇayaphalavedāntavākyavicārarūpaśārīrakamīmāṃsāyām adhikaroti.*

acts, one would not be able to proceed to the study of Uttara Mīmāṃsā. A few lines later, Rāmānuja finally and clearly explains the function of the part of the Veda that has the form of the prescriptions of what one should do: “It is said that in the one who conforms to (*yukta*) prescriptions [found in the Veda] there arises knowledge (*vidyā*) due to the practice of acts prescribed for one’s [particular] stage of life (*āśrama*).”²¹

The status of and the necessity for *svādhyāya* are now clear. It is the duty to be performed accordingly to one’s stage of life, just like other duties prescribed by the Veda are to be performed, as they are an efficacious means on one’s path towards liberation. What does this efficacy consist of? Rāmānuja explains his point of view with a quotation from Īsopaniṣad 11: “He who knows knowledge and nescience, he transcends death through nescience and attains, through knowledge, immortality.”²² It is interesting to see how he interprets the sense of this verse: “Here, what is expressed by the word ‘*avidyā*’ is the act prescribed for one’s caste and stage of life. The meaning [of this sentence is]: he transcends, [i.e.,] he gives up death, [i.e.,] the results of the former [life’s?] acts obstructing the birth of knowledge through nescience, [i.e.,] through an act, and attains, [i.e.,] reaches immortality, [i.e.,] the *brahman* through knowledge, [i.e.,] through cognition. Nescience is understood to be the means of transcending death, different from knowledge, and it is the very act prescribed [by the Veda].”²³

As we can see, Rāmānuja equates here nescience with acts and duties prescribed according to one’s birth or stage of life. Yet his understanding of nescience does not seem to comprise a sense of a merely detrimental and disadvantageous condition. It is clearly indicated that nescience is understood to be acting according to the dharmic instructions, which are helpful in transcending death, i.e., in

²¹ Śrībh₁ 54,14: *evam niyamayuktasyāśramavihitakarmānuṣṭhānenai-va vidyāniṣpattir ity uktam bhavati.*

²² ĪU 11: *vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayaṃ saha | avidyayā mṛtyuṃ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute || 11.*

²³ Śrībh₁ 54,17-19: *atrāvidyāśabdābhihitam varṇāśramavihitam karma. avidyayā – karmaṇā mṛtyuṃ – jñānotpattivirodhi prācīnaṃ karma tīrtvā – apohya vidyayā – jñānena amṛtam – brahma aśnute – prāpnotīty arthaḥ. mṛtyutaranopāyatayā pratītā avidyā vidyetarad vihitam karmaiva.*

destroying the results of past acts. This nescience, taken to mean annihilating the effects of past acts, is not, however, equal to attaining immortality. Yet it is a method, a technique, be it considered auxiliary as it may, that infallibly enables one to approach the final goal of arriving at liberating knowledge.

How is this to be done? Again Rāmānuja affords us a precise answer: “The results of one’s acts that obstruct [the birth of] knowledge has the form of merit and demerit. Both [merit and demerit], giving undesirable results due to the fact that they obstruct the birth of knowledge, are expressed by the word ‘evil’. [...] Therefore an evil act is to be eliminated to enable the birth of knowledge. The elimination [is attained] by the act executed without attachment to the result of [this act]. This very knowledge which is the means of the attainment of *brahman* requires [performing] all acts [connected to a particular] stage of life.”²⁴

In this passage, Rāmānuja describes the function of the *varṇāśramadharmā* in a very lucid manner. Its function is the elimination of the results of acts, regardless whether the acts are – within the circle of tradition – considered to be commendable or not. Every voluntary act involves an idea of its purpose, and the wish for its fulfillment obstructs the attainment of knowledge, which is equated with immortality and *brahman*. In order to achieve the state of liberation, one is to perform his act without attachment to its results. Only such an attitude does not impede the birth of knowledge.

In this way Rāmānuja specifies the function of acts that are prescribed to everyone living within a particular religious tradition. Prescribed obligations and acts are the means leading to the practice of *karmayoga*. *karmayoga* – practised with a *niṣkāmakarma* attitude, the attitude of he who performs his acts and fulfills his obligations without any attachment to their results – is a preliminary step, necessary for everyone intent upon achieving the knowledge of *brahman* or intent upon practicing *bhaktiyoga*. It is the duty paid not only to the society and the requirements of the religious tradition the aspirant

²⁴ Śrībh₁ 54,21-27: *jñānavirodhi ca karma puṇyapāparūpam. brah-majñānotpattivirodhitvenāniṣṭaphalatayobhayor api pāpaśabdābhidheyatvam. [...] ataś ca jñānotpattaye pāpaṃ karma nirasanīyam. tan nirasanam ca anabhisamhitaphalenānuṣṭhītena karmaṇā. [...] tad evaṃ brahmaprāpti-sādhanam jñānam sarvāśramakarmāpekṣam.*

is born into, but above all it is the duty paid by the aspirant to himself, if he wishes to enter into the enquiry into the nature of *brahman*. He who aspires to this must first clearly realize the necessity to fulfill the obligations demanded from him by his religious tradition, not for the sake of perfunctory obeisance, but for his own sake as well.

In the light of the aim of religious practice as explained by Rāmānuja here, it is much easier to understand the principle of the *aika-śāstrya*. From the perspective we now have been able to attain, it might be justified to say that this principle presupposes first and foremost the idea of regarding the Veda as a depository and a teacher, unifying in itself *praxis* (interpreted by Rāmānuja as acting for its own sake, with no expectation of results) and the *gnosis* of one's own tradition. A separate treatment of the *karma-* and the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* is not justifiable in as much as the aim of the parts of the Veda that teach religious duties and obligations, and liberating knowledge is one. The aim is the attainment of the liberating knowledge, and the knowledge of duties is a necessary auxiliary preceding it.

The knowledge of duties comes from learning the texts of the Veda that belong to one's own tradition (*svādhāya*). There is no need to interpret the texts studied. It is enough to learn it from the mouth of an apt and proficient teacher. Only he who has acquired the memory of tradition in the form of particular texts of his own *śākhā* is capable of actualizing purposeful and fruitful things in his own life. Through the performance of his religious duties and obligations done with a conscious effort of not forming an attachment to the results of such acts, a person eliminates, innate to human nature, obstructions to the attainment of liberating knowledge.

In this manner exclusively is one enabled to turn of one's own accord (*svayam eva*) to the 'hearing' (*śravaṇa*) of the Mīmāṃsā, which takes the form of the reflecting upon the (key) statements of the Veda (*mahāvākyas*), the result of which should be the ascertainment and interiorisation of the knowledge transferred by the Vedānta statements.

One is tempted to think as well that the discussion about *aika-śāstrya* is not merely a theoretical question, but might be connected to issues concerning the search for a principle, whose main aim would be unifying philosophical speculations and the religious practice of the Viśiṣṭādvaitins. It should also not be surprising to see that Rāmānuja never referred here to practices adopted from the tradition of Pāñcarātra, though it is clear that he advocated them. The main

purpose and concern of his considerations here is to prove a direct connection and relation between his school and orthodox Hinduism.

To sum up, Rāmānuja's main goals in the discussion on *aikaśāstrya* are most likely the following:

- To place Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta within orthodox Hinduism by indicating the affinities between Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā.
- To indicate the fact that the division into Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā is based upon the perspective from which the Veda is interpreted. Different perspectives lead to the development of different theoretical assumptions that are summed up in a theory. Still, there is only one basis for the two Mīmāṃsās.
- This understanding of the relation between Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā allows Rāmānuja to indicate and to stress the importance of the dharmic duty of the aspirant to attain the knowledge of *brahman*. The single basis of the two Mīmāṃsās, the Veda, requires the aspirant to accomplish a certain amount of preconditions connected to his dharmic duties, the fulfillment of which thus making him qualified to turn to the study of the nature of *brahman* at an appropriate moment. Yet in Rāmānuja's interpretation, the practice and execution of *varṇāśramadharmā* attains a specific significance that diverges from the ritualistic approach of the Mīmāṃsakas. It becomes the means that leads to the practice of *karmayoga*, which, practiced with a *niṣkāmakarma* attitude, is necessary for everyone intent upon achieving the knowledge of *brahman* or intent upon practicing *bhaktiyoga*.