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VALLABHA'S POSITIVE RESPONSE TO BUDDHISM

I focus on the category of *prapañca*, which by an account is central to the systems of thought at hand. *Prapañca* means manufacturing and formalizing an entitative world through language. Buddhism said that the ego is libidinal to the core, that it uses the cogito as a tool of constructing a world of being and nonbeing. Obsessed with selfcertitude, the ego then uses referential language to center the world in itself. Propositional assertions are egological, not logical, and the mission of critical philosophy is to trace the logocentric discourse in the egological cave. Buddhism said that *prapañca* is saṃsara, a delusive field of signs and signifieds, a magical construction of the 'I', which itself is a deceitful signifier. Vallabha said that God is the only magician that there is, that he is a transcendental ego whose desire to say 'I' is of libidinal proportions. God projects the entitative world through referential language only to hide his presence in the world. Vallabha, too, said that the world is *prapañca*, but with a different set of assumptions in mind. *Prapañca*, in his view, is Vr̥ndavana, a thickness of signs and signifieds through which to decode the presence of the hidden God.

The category of *prapañca* entails competing visions of the world. In Buddhism it calls for a methodic deconstruction of the ego and its referential discourse. The world of *is* and *is not*, being and nonbeing, has no center or middle. There is only emptiness, a total silence of entitative speech. In Vallabha *prapañca* entails the opposite. It calls for a methodic reconstruction of referential language, including the world of being and nonbeing. At the center of the world is 'I', and that 'I' is God. Between these two visions of *prapañca* the fundamental issues of Sanskrit thought, indeed any thought, come to the fore. Precisely whose alterity or magic does the referential language disclose? Whose face, man's or God's? And in whose interests is the onto-theological discourse performed in the first place? *Prapañca* best illustrates the tension – and depth – of interreligious discourse in Sanskrit thought.

1. Historical Context

I situate the discourse by citing a myth from *Śrīmadbhāgavatam*, the most authoritative text for Vallabha. Prophecy had it that God Kṛṣṇa would be born to Vasudev and Devaki, who were imprisoned by their kin Kāṁsa, the tyrant king of Mathura. Brahma, the god of Brahmanism, reads the sign in the sky and concludes that the prophecy has indeed come true. Along with Shiva and other gods, he then descends to the world and secretly visits Vasudev and Devaki in their cell in the city of Mathura. Brahma confirms the prophecy by addressing the just-born Kṛṣṇa in these words: "You are truth, commitment to truth, and the genesis of truth itself. You are eternal. I have no wish to logically resolve the puzzle of how eternity comes to be in the world. I accept this puzzle as the mystery of your being."¹

Like most pious souls, Brahma marvels in ambiguity. He is overwhelmed by the presence of God in the world, but he nevertheless speaks with the authority of personal knowledge. He is convinced of that which he admittedly does not know, thus giving decisive answers to the questions he himself has raised in ignorance. Brahma's cognitive ambiguity filters through language. He speaks by virtue of the fact that he can not; he claims speechlessness before God, but he delights in using language to the hilt. "Is there anything," Brahma asks, "which language can address as *is* and *is not*, and which can not be traced to your omnipresence? I need not say much. But I will say this. Those who claim to know you may do so by all means. My body, mind and speech, however, are incapable of knowing your encompassing presence. You are the witness of everything everywhere."²

Brahma's epistemic humility echoes the pride and predicament of faith. In claiming to say little or nothing, he said it all. With a disarming simplicity he situates the issues of Sanskrit thought. Must we speak of things we do not know? And if we must, precisely how? Buddhism inaugurated the critical discourse, insisting that cognitive claims about entities can be made only if they met the conditions of making the claims (*jñānasāmagrī*). Eternal entities, like God, do not

1. *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, Sam. 2021) Vol II. 10.2.26.

2. *Ibid.* 10.14.12.

meet the conditions. This is not to deny that people make claims about the existence of God. Indeed they do, specially Hindu philosophers. It only means that such people mistake fantasies for facts, wishes for reality, eros for logos. They are like a man who has fallen in love with the most beautiful woman in the land without knowing where she lived or what she looked like (*janapadakalyāṇī*). Buddhism announced the death of God, dismissing eternal entities from the discursive space. There is no ontological autonomy, no thing-in-itself. An entity equals the conditions of its existence. It comes to exist through dependence on preceding entities and functions as a causal antecedent of subsequent entities. This is how things are in the world, and that is how they are to be known (tathathā). Buddhism affirmed a world of interdependent difference, a world thick with the reciprocity of *nāma* and *rūpa*, mental and physical entities, governed by causative change. To exist is to cause and be caused in return. That which is not both cause and effect simultaneously does not change, and what does not change does not exist, for example God.

It is the power of Buddhist epistemology that forces Brahma to admit his inability to know God. God alone can witness his presence, not human reason. Brahma is pleased to part company from those, specially Nyaya philosophers, who believe in the omnipotence of epistemic reason. Nyaya responded to Buddhism by using epistemology as the methodology of making ontological claims. *Pramāṇa* was the argument for *prameya*, theory of knowledge for discerning the existence or non-existence of things. The philosophers insisted that purposive actions are preceded by an enlightened cogito, that a methodic demonstration of the existence of definite and indubitable entities is the basis for founding a rational world, and that there is a causal relation between knowing things as they are in themselves and doing meaningful things through them.³ The correspondence theory of knowledge is the key to a rational form of life. Things either exist or they do not; they exist in relation of substance and attribute, and language displays the order of things. No purpose is to be served by mistaking dreams for reality, fantasies for facts, erotic imagination for enlightened cogito. Critical thinking is an *a-posteriori* enterprise, an exercise in syllogistic coherence the paradigm of which is this: *X is Y because of Z*. Wherever there is

3. Udyotkara, *Nyāyavārtikam*, (ed) Shrinivas Shastri (Gaziabad: Indovision, 1986), Vol I, pp. 2-30.

smoke, there is fire, for example, in the kitchen. There is smoke on the hill, therefore it is reasonable to conclude that there is fire on the hill. There is a great deal of syllogistic rationality in the everyday world. Mistaking a fog for smoke leads to disappointment, so does mistaking a snake for a rope. Philosophy serves the interests of commonsense by clearing doubts and by constituting a coherent world. Belief in God is a matter of everyday life. It is a methodological obligation to doubt the truth of "God exists", just as it is an obligation to demonstrate that "God exists" is true.⁴ Nyaya philosophers extended the syllogistic model to prove the existence of God. "God is the cause of the world" is true, because "Whatever exists is caused" is true, for example, a jar. The philosophers believed that the game of life is to be played according to rules. They constructed a world where people follow their station in life, where unity is for more important than equality, where the particular makes sense by virtue of bearing the universal, where individuals are reduced to caste identities, and where the identities are ranked in terms of the laws of pollution and purity. Ontologically speaking, X is Y because of Z; socially speaking, life is as smooth as syllogistic reasoning. There is to be no incongruity in things and concept of things, no gap in knowing and being, no rupture in karma and caste-existence, and therefore no need for revolution or change in the name of social justice. There is to be no doubt, no suspicion, about anything in life. The certainty of the caste-order of society is as solid as cement.

Such is the enlightened cogito of Nyaya philosophy. It does epistemology in the name of constituting a rational order of things, equating meaningful speech with entitative speech. Its discourse is replete with signs and signifiers, its world thick with definite and indubitable referents. (*vācya-vācaka*) Epistemology constitutes a world of certitudes, methodically determining the existence and nonexistence of things. Epistemology is the foundation, the mind and eye of all other sciences such as ethics and economics, politics and law, religion and rituals. Such disciplines are practical, as they are interested in doing things with things, rather than the means of determining their existence or nonexistence. Epistemology offers tools for political management of the world, including the religious world. It grants benefits to practical sciences the same way a king affirms his sovereignty

4. Vatsyayan, *Nyāya Bhāṣyam* Varanasi: Chowkhambha, 1970, 1.1.41.

by doing beneficial things to his servants.⁵ Epistemology is the key to all discourse, ranging from the affairs of kings to those of God's.

Then there emerged Mahayana Buddhists like Aryadev and Chandrakirti. They dethroned the king, deconstructing epistemology in defense of the bodhisattva practice. The bodhisattva is not interested in going to nirvana, let alone in proving the existence of nirvana as a positive or negative entity. Existence is relational, and it is in such relationality, in society itself, that salvation is to be found. A bodhisattva cannot exit the world, and in the world he demands social equality in the name of Tathagata. Such commitment enjoins that no Buddhist shall ever concede the world to an epistemology of static present. Neither can a Buddhist concede meaning to the logocentric discourse, which insists that all speech is entitative and that about the entities one can say either that they exist or they do not. The point, according to Mahayana, is not to do one more epistemology, however corrective, and replace the metaphysics of eternal entities with that of static moments. Doing so would be to succumb to the Hindu ideology of the status quo. The point is that Buddhism is about changing the world, not knowing things as they are in themselves. Chandrakirti notes with dismay that prominent Buddhists, like Dharmakirti and Bhavyaviveka, have fallen to the Hindu trap, to the epistemology of the status quo. They engage in a syllogistic construction of momentary entities on the model of smoke and fire, make propositional assertions about momentariness, and displace suffering in the logocentric discourse.⁶

Chandrakirti thematises the discourse. The point is not to make truth claims about *is* and *is not*. The point instead is to discern the reasons why philosophers make the claims in the first place. Chandrakirti deconstructed the logocentric discourse on its own terms, and in its own territory. Entitative discourse is governed by desire and ontology is no more than a disguised egology.⁷ The cogito is conceived in appetitive cave of the ego. Possessive to the core,

5. Udyotkar, p. 49.

6. Nirlajjataya hetuḥstānta. Chandrakirti, *Prasannapadā* (Darabhanga: Mithila Vidyapitha, 1960) pp. 5-7.

7. Bibhuti S. Yadav, "Methodic Deconstruction" in S. Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (eds) *Interpretation in Religion* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992), pp. 129-166.

driven by the desire to say 'I', the ego posits a 'this', a referent, about which it says 'mine'. Then it does epistemology to formalize its desire, equating truth with the correspondence of cognition and things, words and objects.⁸ The ego even preaches methodic doubt for self-certifying reasons, doubting everything else in order to formalize its own certainty. It confers knownness on objects only to infer its own existence as the knowing subject. It incarnates its own alterity in referential language, manufacturing a world of entities about which one can say 'this' or 'that', 'here' or 'there,' 'now', or 'then', 'eternal' or 'momentary', 'is' or 'is not'. The ego subjects language to entitative compulsions, insisting that units like noun, verb, adverb picture an autonomous order of things.⁹ Its propensity to construct a world of things and categories is total. It populates its world with the duality of subject and object, substance and attribute, soul and body, identity and difference, being and nonbeing, samsara and nirvana, God and Buddha.¹⁰

Chandrakirti redefines the critical discourse. He seeks to deincarnate the ego and its cogito, including referential language. He refuses to do one more epistemology, not even a metaepistemology. He obeys the rules of logocentric discourse, although he does not believe in the validity of the rules. He will use the rules to deconstruct the logocentric world. He declares his right to criticism, insisting that language is not a policeman who deprives man of his freedom of speech.¹¹ He has disdain for those in the establishment who believe that to think seriously is speak referential language, that there can be no philosophy without epistemology. Does philosophy, Chandrakirti asks, alienate itself if it seeks to reflect on its own genesis? Is there no relation between being in the world and doing epistemology? Is it not a shame that philosophers are so defensive about the syllogistic border of discourse, as if it were a mother land?¹² Chandrakirti does have a mother land and borders to defend. He does speak the language of the land. But he is a monk whose mission

8. Chandrakirti, p. 15.

9. Bhikkhu Nananda, *Concept and Reality* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1986) pp. 4-9.

10. Chandrakirti, p. 150.

11. Na hi gāḍḍaḥ daṇḍapaṅkīka iva vaktāram asvataṅtrayanti. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

12. Janmabhūmiriva priyah. Aryadev. *Cathasataka* (ed) by Bhagacandra Jaion (Nagpur: Alok Prakashan, 1971), p. 91.

is to show how epistemology, along with the entitative language, is conceived in a dreamworld. The ego has an erotic propensity for transcendent entities, finding solace in ascribing ontological autonomy for things that it itself projects in dreams. Its world is only a dramatic representation of egocentric alterity, a stage where apparitions are mistaken for reality, erotic imagination for enlightened cognitions.¹³ The point is to erase the trace of the ego and its cogito, to empty consciousness of all referential projections. Philosophy is critical only if it wakes us from the erotic illusion of transcend entities, from the belief that language is comprised of words that are signs of things beyond themselves.¹⁴ Epistemology is a house of passion which critical philosophy burns like a fire. It is not surprising, Aryadev notes, that the house, the egocentric circle, is fearful of critical philosophy, accusing it of nihilism.¹⁵ He counsels courage, which is to bring a new world where there is no 'I' and no other, no identity and no difference, no commitment to being and no fear of nonbeing.¹⁶ The 'I' entails *prapañca*, a thickness of alluring entities that are conceived in egocentric dreams and sustained through empty signifiers. Even the word 'Buddha' is *prapañca*, if it is used to signify an entity over there on the hill. Those who use the word 'Buddha' in the entitative sense fall to egocentric projections to the Hindu ideology of the status quo.¹⁷ The Buddhas do not delight in *prapañca*; they refrain from using language to make claims about *is* and *is not*. They delight in *miṣprapañca*, thus finding salvation in silencing the ego and its referential language. The Buddhas associate *prapañca* with pride: the pride of the possessive ego (*tanhā*), the pride of the cogito (*māna*), and the pride of theoretical construction of the world where philosophers mistake anthropomorphic certainties for the autonomy of being and nonbeing, egocentric subjectivity for criteria of truth and falsity (*dṛṣṭi*)

Mahayana Buddhism inaugurated an era in which the cogito found salvation in its own emptiness. Theory was replaced by praxis, *dṛṣṭi* by *vinaya*, reason by faith. Meeting God face to face in Mat-

13. Yantrakārita yantra yuvatīḥ kāma rāgaspadī bhūṭāḥ. Chandrakīrti, p. 7.

14. Prapañco hi vāk, prapañcayati arthāniti kṛtvā. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

15. Kuḍṛṣṭiṅgā bhayāḥkaram. Aryadev, p. 85.

16. Tattvato nairatmyamiti kuto bhayam. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

17. Vastunibandhaṅ hi prapañcaḥ syuḥ, avastukaḅca Tathāgata. Chandrakīrti, p. 195.

hura, Brahma echoes the difference that Buddhism had made. He finds relief in the death of epistemology, the ego and its cogito. He knows that the cell in which God is born is logocentric, that it has a history of death and violence, and that it silences difference in the name of political coherence. He is pleased with the imminent escape of kṛṣṇa to Vṛndāvana, away from political univocity of urban Mathura to the pluralist rurality of Yadavs. The Yamuna flows between the two worlds, but it must be crossed. Mahayana Buddhism is an argument for liberation of God from the logocentric cell in Mathura. But that only introduces the task at hand. Hinduism must trace the world of being and nonbeing in the heart of God. Brahma has come to Mathura with a mission. He is there to affirm a God who has the desire to say 'I', who disperses his identity in referents like 'this' and 'that', and who does it all in self-centering terms. God affirms his alterity through referential language.¹⁸

Brahma then returns to heaven, but not before issuing a warning. 'God' is more than an ontological word, more than signifier of a being that comes to be the world through language. 'God' also means a supreme person, one who practices *upāya kauśalya* in his own right. God speaks multiple words of salvation, in different epochs and tongues, centering all the words to his heart. Should they choose, people may commit themselves to the body of words through which God has elected to speak to them.¹⁹ It is important that people have the liberty to choose God, including words like 'Buddha' that apparently signify the absence of God. There can be no univocity in Vṛndāvana, no universal ethos, no anonymity or silence in the kingdom of God. A God who is silent or represses difference is no God, and the speaking God lives through the contradictions between and within his own words. Brahma marvels at the *Itiā*, the sacred predicament of God. The contradictions of sacred history are sacred. The omnipresence of God cannot entail anything less than that.

II. Hermeneutics of Prapanca

It is a pity that Brahma rushes back to heaven. He resembles a jet-set swami or a modern liberal who utters platitudes like "unity of

18. Vāco vaibhavam iva gocaraḥ. *Bhagavatam*, 10.14.38-39.

19. Yen jaṅgh samihate. *Ibid.*, 10.2.24-26.

religions" and "global ethos" and then withdraws from the real world. Brahma has no time or ability to do a hermeneutic of difference, no interest in meditating on the issues he himself has raised. The man who did what Brahma could not do was Vallabha, the founder of Śuddhādvaita school of Vedānta.²⁰ He believed in a God who has passion for the world of difference, who creates the world as his body, and who affirms his non-otherness with the body he bears. Honest to God, Vallabha refused salvation in heaven, preferring instead to trace God in the world. In the opening sentences of his *Śāstrārthadīpa Nibandha*, he states his project succinctly. He applauds God Kṛṣṇa who does wondrous things, who makes possible what is logically impossible, and who desires difference and lives through the inescapable reciprocity of *nāma* and *rūpa*, words and objects. God plays the drama of his identity through difference, and he does so to affirm his freedom.²¹ Such freedom of God is *prapañca*.

Vallabha states his strategy just as succinctly. He conceives his own text in *srutis*, the scriptural texts, which he believes are words of God. "After listening to the words of God again and again, having meditated on the words time and again, I hereby propose to uncover the meaning of the words."²² The expression "again and again" is significant. It refers to the instrumental efficacy of the text Vallabha is writing. Truth is enclosed in scriptural texts that are forever present. Truth has no history; what has history is the interpretive understanding of scriptures. Writing in his case is an act of rewriting, the latest attempt to appropriate scriptural truths to his times. Vallabha turns his gaze at the history of Sanskrit thought, the commentarial texts that have preceded his own, and finds to his disbelief that it all has been a mistake. The whole of it, ranging from Samkyha and Nyaya to Buddhism and then to Shankara's Vedānta. He attributes the mistakes to the *kali* era, one in which reason has erased all traces of God and scriptural authority. Dismissing God and reducing scriptures to cognitive nonsense have become matters of fashionable discourse. Hindu scriptures derived the

20. Vallabha: 1478-1530 A.D. Raised, educated and worked in Varanasi. Important works: (1) *Anu Bhasya*, (2) *Tattvarthadīpa Nibandha*, (3) vols; *Subodhini*; (4) *Trīvidha Nama Līla* etc.

21. *Rupānāma Vibhedena yah kridati. Anena kriḍāyam svātantryamuktam.* Vallabha, *Śāstrārthadīpa Nibandha* (first vol. of his *Tattvartha*), ed. by K.N. Mishra (Varanasi: Bharatiya Prakashan, 1971), p. 7.

22. *Vicārya ca punaḥ punaḥ Ibid.*, p. 55.

world from the word of God. But mayavadins, who are most popular in the kali era, say that God has no causal intentionality of his own, no desire to be in the world. They push God to a wretched silence, thus alienating the world from its source. Kali is a modernistic era in the history of Sanskrit thought. Doubting has become a methodological obligation, the ego declares its omnipotence in the categorial constitution of the world, and the cogito appropriates to itself the power to define the true and the false, suffering and salvation. Even the gods have announced their independence from God. They, too, are driven to writing texts on epistemology! Thus do they disguise themselves in the bodies of authors like Kapila, Kanada, Gautama and Udayana.²³

Vallabha discerns signs of hope in the kali era, however. He has a memory of how the ego began and how it ended. It inaugurated epistemology as a tool of methodic construction of the world, and it ended up with total *nairātmya*, with a methodic deconstruction of itself and its world on its own terms. Vallabha is grateful to Mahayana Buddhism for clearing the epistemological slum, for forcing the logocentric discourse to face its own contradictions. If epistemic reason cannot affirm anything of God, then it cannot deny anything of him, either. Vallabha's disagreement with Buddhism is on the level of faith, not methodology. He is unhappy with the Buddhist claim that 'God' is an empty signifier, that belief in God is a cover for the anthropomorphic, even erotic, compulsions of man. The claim is based on questionable assumptions, namely, that the reality signified by 'God' has no anthropomorphic compulsions of its own, that it has no desire to project a world in its own image, or that it has no longings to bound itself with world it projects. Vallabha concedes the merits of Buddhist argument against those who envision God as an eternal substance. But he preempts the argument by saying that God is the only subject that there is, that becoming or change is intrinsic to his being. God desires endless finitudes, thus affirming his alterity through *nāma* and *rūpa*, his sovereignty through radical dependence. Vallabha concedes that 'God', if used as an epistemic signifier, is nothing but nonsense. The point, however, is not to know God; the cogito on its own can never know God. The point is to understand 'God' hermeneutically, which is to gather the meaning of the word in scriptural texts. God does strange things in the kali era, one of which is to let himself be eclipsed by the

23. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

words of those who deny his existence. The words and body of Buddha, Vallabha believes, are the signs of the hidden God.²⁴ And he will do scriptural hermeneutic to bring God back from hiding.²⁵ He will meditate on the category of *prapañca* itself. Buddhism used the category to deconstruct the world of referents, reducing 'God' to an empty signifier. Vallabha will meet Buddhism face to face. He will use the category of *prapañca* to reclaim the world of referents, showing that 'God' is the most fulfilling word in language. And he will do it all by returning to his own scriptural texts. He will establish the divinity of *prapañca*.

What do the texts say about 'God'? They say God is. (Ṛg Veda, 3.29.5) *As*, the Sanskrit equivalent of *is*, means to arise, to occur, to let be, to stand, to come to stand, to accomplish, to present, to come to be present.²⁶ *Bhu* is another equivalent of *is*, meaning to come to be, to light or reveal, to open up, to unfold, to keep on unfolding.²⁷ *Vas* is still another equivalent of *is*. It means to dwell, to reside, to stay, to come to stay. In its diverse stems *as*, along with *bhu* and *vas*, is used as the preeminent verb. It is the ground of, and immanent in, all other verbs and their roots, such as *pac* (to cook), *gam* (to go) etc.²⁸ The scriptures also use *as* in the sense of the most inclusive tense verb. They use it in the sense of 'becomes', 'happens', 'became', 'happened', 'will become', 'will happen'. *As* is invariably associated with 'God' as its noun. "God was one and he desired to beget himself as many" (Chāndogya, 7.25.2); "He desired" (Taittiriya, 2.6); "He created himself" (Taittiriya, 2.7); "God becomes all that is possible" (Ṛg Veda 10.90.2); "He was in the beginning; knowing he was God, he became all that is.", (Bṛhdārṇyaka, 1.4.10)

24. Buddhāvataṅga tu adhuṅga. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

25. Gūḍhartha prakāṣi karomi. Vallabha, Subodhini, 1.1.9; see also Jeff Timm (ed) *Text in Context* (Albany: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 127-146.

26. *Ṛgveda* 7.74.6; 1.4.4; 5.52.12; 1.51.3. Asti bhavati vartati vidyatinama artah satta. Sa ca aneka kala sthayimi. Sattēh ātmadhāranam. Nagesh Bhatt, *Vaiyakaraṇa Siddhānta Param Laghu Mañjusa*, ed. by Kapiladev Divedi (Kuruksetra Kuruksetra University Press, 1975), p. 147.

27. Bhavati iti bhāvah. *Mahabhaṣya*, 1.3.1; Also. *ṚgVed*, 10.121.3; 1.96.7; 6.20.3; 10.96.7; 1.34.1.

28. Bhuvādya dhātavah. *Astadhyāyī*, 1.3.1; Bhāva eva hi dhātvartheḥ Āgameḥ Bhartrhari, *Vākya Padiyam*. 3.8.84.

Vallabha gathers scriptural usages of *is* for a purpose. He wants to do theology of grammar, thus centering all forms of speech in 'God'. He knows that the case endings of Sanskrit grammar constitute the rule of discourse. And he will appropriate the case endings to his own purpose, saying that the endings are only variations of the scriptural usages of 'God is'.²⁹

We recall that in Sanskrit grammar, the nominative is the most privileged case ending. It controls all other case endings, indeed the meaning of life itself. Terms used in the case signify a subject who has desires, whose consciousness is intentional and is thus directed toward an aim or end, and who has the freedom to appropriate the means with which to realize the end.³⁰ Vallabha cites scriptural passages to show that the word 'God' is just that. The scriptures use 'God' to signify the preeminent subject, a self-conscious being who desires objects and has the freedom of means to materialize his desires.³¹ An object is what the subject most and ardently desires, something that comes to exist through the appropriative intentionality of the subject. An object is not a thing-in-itself (*vastu svabhāva*), an autonomous entity about which the cogito can say either that it exists or that it does not. The subject is an act-subject; driven by possessive intentionality, it seeks a 'this', a body to announce its own identity. The object, too, is an act-object, an instance of embodied desires.³² God, as subject, cannot remain a thing-in-itself, a tautological presence like the mayavadin's Brahman. There is no pleasure in being alone, no meaning in an identity that excludes from itself the possibility of difference.³³ The scriptures use 'God' to signify a being that has passion for *prapañca*, a subject that seeks to mediate its identity through difference. In saying "God is all this," the scriptures affirm God as the preeminent object.³⁴ God is a subject who creates himself as his own object, and

29. Sarva vibhaktingāma prakāśasya ca Bhagavanēvārthaḥ. *Śāstrārtha*; p. 217.

30. Savatantraḥ kartā. *Aṣṭādhyayi*, 1.4.54.

31. Bhavisyāmi iti karmakartṛ bhāvāt *Aṅubhasya*, 1.4.26. Also, Bhāvanāśasya sati viśayāḥ vyabhicāriṇi, *Śāstrārtha*, p. 96.

32. Vyāpāra phala āśrayatvena. Nagesh Bhatt, p. 327; Bhagavadkrto Bhagadrūpasya. *Subodhini*, 11.3.3; Ātma kṛte parināmāt. *Brahma Sūtra*, 1.4.26.

33. Ekāki na ramet. *Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.3.

34. Viśayo Bhagvan. *Subodhini*; 2.9.33; Jagadrūpa viśayatā. *Prameya Ratnaṛava*. (Varanasi: Anand Prakashan, 1971), p. 15.

in his own image. He authenticates his identity through non-otherness with the object of which he himself is the subject (Śuddhādvaita)³⁵. God is a creature of which he himself is the creator, an effect of which he himself is the cause. God is his own before and after, his own dependent origination. The world is *prapañca* precisely for this reason: it embodies the non-otherness of God with himself.³⁶

Sanskrit grammar, however, does not end discourse with nominative and accusative case endings. It also speaks of the instrumental case ending, which stands for the appropriate means the subject chooses to materialize the object. It is good that a theology of grammar conceives of God as a subject that affirms its non-otherness with itself as an object. But the question still remains: How does such non-otherness happen? It is good to equate "God is" with "God happens as God". But what is the means through which the non-otherness of God with the world is achieved? Vallabha's answer is simple: the playful will of God. Between God who happens as the world and God who so desires to happen, between the subject and the object, there is the will of God himself. "God happens" equals "God happens through God." The scriptures use 'God' in the instrumental case ending (*sādhakatvena*). The usage refers to a being that delights in difference, a being that has a passion for affirming its 'I' in the 'other-I', and does so by becoming the consequent of its own will.³⁷ God falls from being-in-himself, his unmediated presence, to becoming an other to himself. He has his own way of being, which is to fall in the thick of *prapañca*, in the middle of the world. The world is the way of God positing himself as his own middle, and through the instrumental efficacy of his own will. God falls, he falls intentionally, and he falls to center the world in himself. The scriptures use 'God' in the sense of the supreme dative. The usage envisions the world as a sacrificial altar, a place where God sacrificed eternity only to offer it to his being in time (*sampradānatvam*).³⁸

Freedom entails an ablative form of life. In saying 'I', God falls from eternity to time. But he also iterates himself as the transcendental ego, thus falling to a life of self-predicative possibilities, to reclaiming

35. Svātmarūpeṇa Bhagavaṇ viracayati. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

36. Ramaṇārtham eva prapañca rupena āvirbhāvāt. *Sastrartha*. p. 80.

37. Sādhakatvam karanatvam. *Astadhyayi*. 1.4.42; Tadkṛta sādhanarūpeṇa kriṣṭi Bhagavaṇ. *Sastrartha*, p. 80.

38. Prapañca madhya pātitvena Brahmaṭmakatvā *Ibid.* p. 81.

his being through becoming. The fall places self-transcendence in the heart of God. Because he is given to saying 'I' to an infinite degree, God come to be 'this' or 'that' being in such a way that something invariably is left for him to say and to be. That is the meaning of *neti neti*, which means that God predicates a 'this' to himself only to transcend that very predication. The scriptures use 'God' in the sense of the supreme ablative, a being enclosed in self-distantiation and who departs from the present only to wait for his arrival in the future.³⁹ Time is in God; God is in time; and God has time to be the world. Time alienates God from God, just as it brings God back to himself. Time elevates God to a life of alienation without estrangement. There is no *yoga* without *viyoga*, no union without separation, no mediation without distance, no logos without eros, and no I without other. The world indeed is *prapañca*, but only in the sense of the dialectical arrival and departure, presence and absence of God himself.⁴⁰

The scriptures connect the ablative usage of 'God' with its locative sense as well. God fell from eternity only to mediate his identity through time. Mediation has meaning only if it relates the source of the fall with the locus of the fall, as in "The leaf falls from the tree to the ground". 'God', in "God falls from eternity to time," refers to the agent that falls as well as the source and the locus of the fall. 'God' is the supreme locative, the preeminent ground word (*adhikaraṇa*). It signifies an absolute agent of freedom, a being that exits his eternal immediacy only to fall *as* himself, *in* a world *of* his own, and *in* a world that is he himself.⁴¹ 'God' refers to a possessive being *par excellence*, the transcendental ego that centers temporality in his own infinity, the world in his own arché.⁴² *Prapañca* is precisely such freedom of the falling God. *Prapañca* is not *samsara*, not a field where an empty 'I' afflicts itself with deceitful signifiers. *Prapañca* is *Vṛndāvana*, a liberating thickness of signs and signifiers, an addressive field where the rural cowherds say 'Thou' to God Kṛṣṇa who alone can say 'I'. The world as

39. Vibhāga āśrayatvam upādānatvam. Tad eva adhikaranatvam. Nagesh Bhatt. p. 55; Vyuccaranasya angikāratvāt. *Prameya*. p. 29.

40. Angikrtvāt sīstīpravahe. *Prameya*. p. 259.

41. Ātma ratau ātmani kṛdāyām. *Subodhinī*; 3.8.10.

42. Ādhāro adhikaranam. *Aṣṭadhyāyī*. 1.4.45; Brahmane vyuccarato Brahmaphutasya Brahmaphūte pradege Brahmaphūtam vyuccaraṇam. *Prameya*. p. 29.

Vṛndāvana is a dialogical circle, a place where people come to face God through language (abhimukhibhavat). Vallabha cites a verse from *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* which encloses all case endings in the word 'God' with succinct elegance: "Whatever and through whatever, from whatever and of whatever, in whatever and whenever-it is all God, the supreme person".⁴³

Vallabha gives privilege to *Prapañca* for strategic reasons. His mission is to retrieve the question that the Ṛgveda first asked and which has always defined Hinduism. It is the question of origin, i. e., whence has the world come? Vallabha is convinced that there are no answers without questions, that a tradition is sustained by the questions it reiterates, and that a community is estranged from itself if it loses interests in the foundational questions. It is worth recalling that Shakyamuni inaugurated a new community by dismissing questions of origin. The point, Buddha said, was not to raise—and answer—the questions about the beginning and end of the world. That would be mistaking the symptoms for the cause. The point is to thematise the onto-theological discourse, and to trace the egological origin of the question itself. Buddhism, specially Mahayana Buddhism, did just that. Unable to bear its finitude, the ego performs onto-theological discourse. It displaces fear of finitude in a genealogical belonging to the transcendent, in an eternal entity that is believed to be in the beginning of the world. Buddhism dismissed the question of origin, focusing instead on deconstructing the ego and its libidinal cogito.⁴⁴ Vallabha retrieves his tradition by reiterating the question of origin. He traces the origin of the world in Kṛṣṇa, a God who has a passion to say 'I' and whose love for finitude is of libidinal proportions.⁴⁵ This Vallabha does in the name of scriptural authority. In the beginning was God. He looked around and found himself alone. Desirous of being with others, he named himself as 'I'. Thus did he come to create and bear the world of difference.⁴⁶

43. Yatra yato yasya yasmai yadyadyā yadā. *Bhāgavata* 10.85.4; *Śāstrartha*. p. 217.

44. Kama jānāmi te mulam. Chandrakirti, p. 149.

45. Kṛta kṣaṇa ātmaratau. *Bhagavata*. 3.8.10.

46. Aham nāma abhavat. *Taittiriya*. 2.11; Ahamāsmi ite agre aham nāmbhavat. *Bṛhadāryaka Upanishad*. 1.4.1.

III. The Recovery of Identity

Vallabha affirms God as the preeminent ego with two things in mind. He plans a shift from the Hindu metaphysics of substance, which Buddhism thankfully deconstructed, to a theology of subject, with which he defends his tradition. The shift affords him a methodic reconstruction of the world. Vallabha meets Buddhism on its own terms, this time with the category of *nāma-rūpa*. He rescued *prapañca* from *samsara*, saying that the world is body of God and it is real, good and beautiful. He will do the same with *nāma-rūpa*, showing that the inescapable reciprocity of name and form, words and objects, is a divine play (*krīḍā*). He concedes that Buddhism was right in saying that the word 'I' names egocentric desire for identity, not an already existing entity. But he insists that Buddhism failed to discern the source, and magnitude, of the desire that names itself in signifier like 'I' and 'this'. Vallabha traces the desire, and the subsequent reciprocity of *nāma* and *rūpa*, in the entity that was in the beginning of the world, in God.

Nāma, the Sanskrit equivalent of 'name', is derived from the root *naṃ*, meaning to descend, to turn toward, to bend. Grammatically speaking, terms signifying the noun descend into the movement of a sentence, yielding primacy to the verb and letting the sentence incarnate itself has a body of meaning.⁴⁷ In "I am going", the term 'I' descends into 'going', the verb, thus holding the semantic freedom of the nominative (case) by becoming a "going I". (Nirukta 1.1) Grammar is more than a regulated order of speech. It reflects the order of things as well. Theologically speaking, God, in saying "I be many", descends into becoming, the creative act, thus holding the ontological freedom of 'I', the subject, by turning into a "becoming God." In saying 'I', God exits immediacy with himself, his being-in-itself (*vyuccarana*), thus desiring his being in becoming and dispersing his identity in difference. What annuls the immediacy is language, the saying of 'I'. God comes to be the world through language, by naming himself as 'I'.

'I' is an originary word; it precedes all words in language, indeed the world itself. Buddhism dismissed 'I' and 'God' from discursive

47. Durgacharya on *Nirukta*. p. 1.

space, saying they are signs of the libidinal ego (kāmamūlaṃ). Vallabha does the opposite. He equates 'I' with 'God' and centers all discourse in the equation.⁴⁸ The name 'I' is omnireferential. The word differentiates itself in linguistic finitudes, it dwells in those very differentiations, and it is the source of all forms of speech acts and terms of discourse (sarveṣām abhidheyatā). It is the word 'I' - and by extension 'God', that happens as nouns and pronouns, verbs and adverbs, suffixes and prefixes.⁴⁹ It is the 'I' of God that incarnates itself in the commanding words of mother Yashoda, the romantic exuberance and subsequent anguish of the cowherd girls of Vrndavana, the emancipatory accusations of a devotee like Uddhav, the comedic follies of the sage Narada, the poetic elegance of Suradas, the politics of contradictions in the *Mahābhārata*, the tragic discourse of Shakyamuni and, of course, in the disciplinary sternness of Panini's grammar. There is no escape from the word 'God'. In fact 'God' is the only word that there is in language, affirming its sovereignty by instantiating its non-otherness with all other words, actual or possible. The saying of 'I' by God is the birthplace of meaning, the transcendental identity from which the world of discourse emanates, where it dwells and in which it finds its limit. "That which is exhaustively involved in masculine, feminine and neuter; in singular, dual and plural; and in all case endings-the scriptures call 'God'."⁵⁰

IV. The Recovery of Difference

Vallabha associates *nama* with *rupa*, tracing them in a God that has passion for finitude and change. God's 'I' is the arche in which all signifiers and terms of speech are conceived. It also is replete with noetic nameability, with the desire to stage referents. God has endless desire to say 'I', just as he has the concomitant will to posit himself as a 'this', as a referent. He who is omnipresent alone can be present in the form of this or that particular entity; he who is greater than the greatest alone can be smaller than the smallest. Not only does 'God' signify that than which none greater there is, it also signifies that than which none smaller there can be.⁵¹ God shrinks his omnipotent identity to

48. *Subodhini*. 2.9.32.

49. Divayati svatantryena kridati karoti iti devaḥ. *Astādhyāyi*. 3.1.134.

50. Sadṛgam trisu liṅgesu sarvasu ca vibhaktisu vacanesu ca sarvesu. *Prāṇavopaniṣad* p. 15.

51. Aṇu a Brahma vyapakam bhavati. *Sastrartha*. p. 164.

stage difference, thus affirming his freedom in maximum finitudes. It is because God is omnipresent that he can playfully dwell in the arms of mother Yashoda; it is because he is all encompassing that he can pass as finite beings.⁵² Hence the difference of self and the body, body and body, subject and object, object and abject. Difference is sacred; it is *rupa*, the body of God in time and space. Every entity, positive or negative, is an instantiated immanence of Krsna, a sign of God in hiding.⁵³ God alone is a finite subject; he alone comes to pass as a cognitive agent that knows a thing in such a way that it does not know everything about it or something about all things. Cognitive finitude is a sign of omniscience in hiding. God alone is a particular object, an entity that is definite by virtue of entailing in it the absence of all those things that are not it. The universal presence of God accounts for the definite difference of things. Shrinking his omnipresence to an absolute minimum in space, God comes to be an entity, say X, which is at a point Y in space and cannot be at point Z at the same time. Ontological finitude is a sign of omnipresence in hiding. It is to decode such sign that the poets in Vrndavana look at every tree and leaf, every turn and corner in awe. Who knows at what point in space, and in what or whose guise, God may be present? Faith begets suspicion, which in turn affirms the sanctity of finitude as the dispersed universality of God.

What is true of space is true of time. Every moment is an instance of eternity dispersing its sovereignty in the ultimate minimum of time. God alone can be a moment, he alone is momentary, and he alone dispenses his freedom through dependent origination. Freedom entails radical dependence. That which causes everything alone can be caused to an unlimited degree. Buddhism said that an entity which is believed to cause everything without being caused is fictional. Vallabha concedes the merit of the argument, but he insists that God is the first cause only because he causes endlessly and is an effect till the end.⁵⁴ God's desire to say 'I' is beginningless and endless; so is his will to be in response to the saying. 'God' means *bṛhati*; it denotes a being that has an unsurpassable propensity to surpass his identity through difference.⁵⁵ God has come to surpass himself in the act of self-surpassing,

52. Paricchedo vyapakatvaḡca. *Ibid.*

53. Ānandanḡa tirohitvat. *Anu Bhasya*. 2.3.43.

54. Karana rupasya Brahmaḡah kḡryarḡpena avirbhavat. *Prameya*. p. 7.

55. *Viṡṇu Puraḡa*. 3.3.21; *Bhagavatam*. 3.5.22.

to forever chasing his own possibilities through the desire that entails those very possibilities, and therefore to becoming a being that inescapably ends up being less than what he can be. God alone is subject to dependent origination, to becoming a consequent of which he himself the antecedent. He is driven to qualifying his being through the recurrence of presence and absence, appearance and disappearance, and to becoming a 'this' or 'that' only to prehend the infinity of objects that he has yet to be. God alone is imperfect precisely because he alone is the agent of perfectability. The claim of imperfection by human beings is a sign of *hubris*, a not so deep a cover for moral pride. God centers perfectability in his own temporality. He was in the past, he is in the present, and he cannot escape the future. He is called 'lord' precisely because he begets and bears himself in the inescapable futurity of finitudes, thus living through a teleological destiny the completion of which is always promised and forever delayed.⁵⁶ The world is the *rūpa* of God, his bodiliness in process. Like a river it never stops flowing. God has come to be in time forever (*sṛī pravāhe*). God lives through endless difference.

V. Between Identity and Difference.

Such is Vallabha's response to Buddhism and, by implication, to the history of Sanskrit thought. God happens as points in space and moments in time; he happens essentially; and he does so to affirm his sovereignty in the reciprocity of *nāma* and *rūpa*, in the finitude of words and objects. Vallabha calls this reciprocity *prapañca*, equating it with *Vṛndāvana*. The implications of the equation are clear. There can be no silence in *Vṛndāvana*, no truth in a mystical tautology that excludes from itself the possibility of endless predications. *Vṛndāvana* is conceived in speech; it lives in speech, and there is no end to speech. There just is no *nāma* without *rūpa*, no word that is not a signifier of an entity, and no entity that also is not a referent of a word. *Vṛndāvana* dwells in the self-predicative possibilities of God through language. Because God fell into the world by saying 'I', and because the 'I' disperses itself in all possible signs and significations, God is immanent in all sorts of themes and forms of discourse. There just is no word in language that is not derived from 'God', no entity in the world that is not a consequent of God saying

56. *Subodhini*, 10.3.25.

'I'. 'God' is the word more than which language cannot say, just as it is God alone less than which language cannot speak. God alone is affirmable and deniable in speech, and it is God alone, who having instantiated his presence in linguistic finitudes, is engaged in endless assertions and denials, including negation of his own existence.⁵⁷ Vallabha is serious about the omnipresence of the word 'God'. If 'God' is an omnipresent word, and if claims are made to deny the existence of the being referred to by the word, then it is the altering of God that is reinforced by those very claims. The omnipotence of the word 'God' is wondrous. It is God alone who speaks, just as it is God who alone is spoken about. So desperate is God in centering all speech in himself, that he hides himself in the body and words of Tathagata, words that discern his absence in the world. God appropriates certitude by becoming the agent of his own denial, by becoming his own *cogito ergo sum*. Methodic doubt is the greatest friend of faith, atheistic discourse the most definite display of the alterity of God in reverse. Discerning God's absence is still better than silence, specially the silence of Advaita Vedanta. Absence after all is the sign of the hidden God (tirobhāva līlā).⁵⁸ There is an immense plurality of the names of God in Vṛndavana, including those that deny his existence. So immense that the poets exclaim in exhaustion: By how many names?

Indeed, by how many names? The question displays the burden of kaliyuga, the modern era, which Vallabha believes is the best of eras. The question is raised strategically, which is to re-present the scriptures for a new beginning. Vallabha notes with anguish that the history of Sanskrit thought has deviated from its source. Hindu scriptures laid down the foundations of Sanskrit thought with this question: What was the name of that which was in the beginning.⁵⁹ The poets, who composed the scriptures, were stunned by the magnitude of the question they had just raised. They gather their wits, however, and recognize it to be the greatest of all questions, one better than which there is none.⁶⁰ They also foreclose the destiny of Sanskrit thought in their own answer. In the beginning was God, he conceived the world in a libidinal communion with language, and he did so to disperse his spermatic logos

57. Sarvesam abhidheyata. *Saṣṭrartha*. p. 223.

58. Avirbhava tirobhavaiḥ. Mohanam bahurupataḥ p. *Ibid* 226.

59. Ko namasi. *Yajurveda*. 27.29.

60. Eka eva tam samprasnam. *Rg Veda*. 10.52.3.

in thousands and thousands of names, and in as many objects.⁶¹ The world is an immense bodiliness of God in names, his genealogical mediation through language.⁶² It is the significance of such mediation, this being of God in time, that the history of Sanskrit thought failed to understand. The radical monism of Shankaracharya reduced truth to tautological immediacy, speech to silence. Fearful of difference, Shankara found salvation in an identity which has no contents whatsoever and from which relational existence has fled. Then there were radical pluralists like Sautrantic Buddhists, including Nyaya, who elevated difference to ontological autonomy, Truth to unmediated particularity. These two extremities rest on a questionable assumption, namely, that there is an irreconcilable opposition between identity and difference, self and the other, unity and plurality. Either identity or indifference is true, not both. Either/or logic reined in the past, dualism dominated the discursive space. There was no trace of the middle, no sign of mediated existence. Then came Mahayana to seal the fate of the dualistic episteme. It deconstructed both identity and difference, resulting in the supremacy of neither/nor logic. If 'I', the self, has no ontological privilege, then neither does the not-I, the other. Mahayana erased all signs in the middle, thus completing the history of Sanskrit thought with an extraordinary consistency. It placed salvation in *Śūnyatā*, in the radical silence of relational existence.

Vallabha's reading of the history of Sanskrit thought is questionable. His stance, however, is ephocal. He looks at the past of Sanskrit thought with an eye on the future, discerning signs of hope in the kali era. There is no meaning in a regressive return to the past, no salvation in imagining a golden utopia in face of crises in the present. The regressive utopia is enclosed in dualistic episteme and dogmatic extremities. Vallabha is grateful to Mahayana for terminating the ills of either/or logic with surgical skill. The death of the past entails a new era, the touchstone of which is *Vṛndāvana*, a place where God mediates his identity through difference. The mediation of God with himself is the model for religious identity and difference. There is no such thing as a religion in itself, no religious identity without the difference that the other makes. There is no meaning

61. *Rāpam pratirāpam vabhāva. Rg Veda. 6.47.18; Bibhuti S. Yadav, "Methodic Deconstruction", pp. 134-139.*

62. *Sahasradha mahimaneḥ sahaḡram yavad. Rg Veda. 10.114.8.*

in unmediated identity, and the autonomy of difference, the other in itself, is just as meaningless. There is no meaning in unique universality, in the univocity of "global ethos," for example. Despite liberal euphemism, the discourse of "global ethos" is in effect a sign of the hegemonic motifs of the place in which it is conceived. The discourse is reactionary, a tool for recentering the new world in the old.

The universality associated with "transcendental unity" is just as reactionary. The expression is central to the neo-Vedantic discourse that was inaugurated by Rammhohan Roy and later enforced by Vivekanand, Shri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan. The ideology of "unity" defines the elitist culture of modern India. In tune with the old combine of Shankaracharya and Manu, it denies the social other, the dispossessed majority in Hindu society, the religious right to self-representation. The unity is so transcendental that it refuses to disperse itself as social equality. It finds truth not in speech but in silence; in coherence and national unity, not in the right to dissent for social justice. The "unity" denies a body, a historical identity, to the religious other as well. It loves the other only if it inscribes its identity in silence. Vedantic unity is as repressive of difference as is the ideology of "global ethos." The former silences internal difference, arrogating to Shankara's Vedanta the right to represent the whole of Sanskrit thought. "Global ethos" does violence to external difference, appropriating to the West the right to represent the whole world. They both seek to validate pseudo-unity through interreligious dialogue. Not only do they enforce each other's illusions through the dialogue, they also promote religious fundamentalism in the guise of a liberal ethos.

Vallabha would have none of it. Unity is authentic if it is pluralised, only if it affirms diversity as *prapañca*, as the body of God. God has dispersed his identity in religious difference, he dwells in the difference, and he mediates his identity by placing himself in the middle of difference.⁶³ It is not easy being in the middle, specially for God. There can be no silence or global univocity in the middle, only conflicts, even contradictions. Vallabha celebrates the middle in the name of scriptural

63. Nāṇa vāḍānurodhi tad. (*Sāstrārtha*) p. 222.

authority, courageously facing the historical implications of his faith in the omnipresence of an omnipotent God. History is the medium through which God discloses his presence through sacred and secular words, and a religion is historical only if it affirms the pluralities of the words. There was no time in history when God was without a word, no time when he shall be silent after speaking the last word, and in the middle he lives through the contradictions entailed in his own words. This is what historical experience is all about. Contradictions are at the heart of God, and that is why God is God.⁶⁴

There is no point in a revisionist theology of history that deprives God of his right to speak. History bears witness to the truth that God speaks in such a way that he finds reasons to speak again and again. Nor is there any point in the logocentric discourse that fears contradictions and reduces truth to tautology. Vallabha is aware of those in Sanskrit thought who have faith in the laws of logic, who equate contradiction with nonsense, and who erase all signs of a middle between *X* and *not-X*. Logic is an ideology of coherence, unanimity and the status quo. It encloses *X* in *X*, truth in tautological presence, thus silencing the middle that makes the difference. The logocentric discourse finds meaning in unmediated certitudes. The Christian is a Christian, and nothing else; the Buddhist a Buddhist, and nothing else; the Hindu a Hindu, and nothing else. Identity becomes so autonomous – and tautological – that a religious I has no intrinsic reasons, no scriptural compulsions, to understand itself through the not-I. Driven by anthropomorphic extremity, by Yashoda's syndrome of roping Kṛṣṇa, the I omnipresents its own identity in the heart of God. The other is an alien, there need to be no signs of its presence in the kingdom of God. Thus is how God comes to be enchained in either/or logic. God is either Christian or he is nothing, Islamic or nothing, Hindu or nothing. He cannot be both, and much more, at the same time.

Vallabha replaces logocentric rationality with scriptural authority. Scriptures say that God is so only because he speaks words of difference, because his words conflict with one another, and because he places himself in the middle of the conflict.⁶⁵ The middle mediates

64. Etavanasya mahimā ito, purusasya. *Ṛg Veda*. 10.90.3.

65. Viruddha sarvadharmānam . . . sarvadharam. *Sastrartha*. p. 222.

identity and difference, establishes interminable interdependence between the two, and denies either of them the right to silence the other. Conflict is different from both interreligious smile and hatred. It is the foundation of competitive co-existence, for creative and mediated identities. Conflict is the key that controls history. History is thick with words of God, no word is first or last, and none has the power to erase any or all others. Diversity is historical, its echoes as sweet as the sound of a flute. Of necessity, a religious I discovers its identity through a contrary, in the face of difference.⁶⁶ The vice versa is just as true. History displays wondrous deeds of God. One such deed is Vṛndāvana, the land where God Kṛṣṇa is embodied in the wonder of thousands and thousands of names (adbhud karmaṇe). There need be no unity in the land, if it means a "Hindutva" that suppresses the voice of difference. No matter how dear to the neo-Vedantic elite, such unity is empty, even unfaithful to God Kṛṣṇa. It only reiterates the death and violence that the univocity in Mathura entailed; it promotes monological immediacy and silences God in the process. There is no point in returning to Mathura, or to Ayodhya for that matter. Neither is there any point in a difference that seeks separation from Vṛndāvana. No matter how fashionable or postmodernistic, such difference is reactionary to the extreme. It absolutises a monological immediacy of ethnic or monotheistic sort, silencing the multivocity of God in the process. Vṛndāvana is a land where democracy is a sacred idea, where the rights to identity and difference, claims and counter-claims, emanate from a God who just cannot be silent. Vṛndāvana is the body of God, the source and locus of all possible forms of dissent in history. It cannot be mutilated.

What would Tathagata say to Vallabha, were he to return to the land of his birth? Would he recognize Kṛṣṇa's voice that emanates from his own body? I leave the answers to Maitreyanath, the future Buddha. There are political and social signs that ask for Maitreya's rebirth in his homeland. Meanwhile, I cannot resist making a few observations on behalf of the absent Tathagata. It is good that

66. For my stance on religious diversity, see K.K. Klostermaier "The Response of Modern Vaisnavism" in Harold G. Coward (ed) *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) pp. 129-150.

Vallabha has presented an epochal vision of *prapañca*, building upon the Mahayana deconstruction of the logocentric discourse. It is good, too, that Vallabha believes in incarnational reversal, insisting that it is Kṛṣṇa who speaks in the guise of Tathagata. The staying power of Tathagata is wondrous indeed, even in his absence. So magical is his communicative skill that he makes his point even in the guise of apparitions, let alone God. It is good that Kṛṣṇa does in kali-yuga what Tathagata does in all ages. How one speaks is important. But just as important is the theme. Mahayana deconstructed *prapañca* to make room for the bodhisattva ideal, refusing personal salvation in favor of the opportunity to erase suffering and social indignity from the world. It is good that Vallabha, too, refused to go to heaven, preferring instead to celebrate the world as *prapañca*, as the body of God. The body may be real. But it certainly is neither good nor beautiful, not in the social sense of the terms. The caste order of society justifies indignity and humiliation of the voiceless majority in the name of Gita, which Vallabha believes is the word of Kṛṣṇa. The Gita says that Hindu society is the body of God, that the body is an end in itself, and that the politics of karmayoga is the most efficient means to the end. Tathagata would wonder: Is this the Gita to speak which Kṛṣṇa fled the cell in Mathura? It is good that Vallabha has replaced karmayoga with bhaktiyoga. But how would he use bhaktiyoga as a tool of social change? The dispossessed rurality of Vṛndāvana can wait no longer. How soon will Kṛṣṇa speak a new Gita, even in the guise of Tathagata? This time, though, it has to be a Gita that demands social equality and justice for all on religious grounds.