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Brahmavāda: A universal concept

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Abstract:

Bhāratīya Darśana or Indian Philosophy is considered to be one of the oldest philosophies in the world. The basics tenets of one of the main schools of Indian Philosophy, known as Vedānta, are highly insightful and practically applicable. The various concepts of Vedānta can be traced in modern day sciences as well as other worldwide philosophies. Vallabhācārya propounds the theory of Brahmavāda after a thorough study of Upaniśads and other Vedantic scriptures. The motive of the research is to correlate the Brahmavāda theory of Vedānta with Science, Zoroastrian and Egyptian philosophies.

Keyword: Vallabhācārya, brahmavāda, science, universe creation, zoroastrian philosophy, Egyptian philosophy

Introduction

The Bhāratīya Darśana or Indian philosophy is diving deep into the search of the Ultimate Reality. Our Vedas and Upaniśads are oceans of knowledge, exploring which, our great saints have acquired the invaluable gems of eternal knowledge. Among the six jewels that have been found from the ocean bed, the Vedānta is a priceless diamond. It has been polished from various angles by various ācāryas.

One such ācārya is the sixteenth century saint known as Vallabhācārya. He belonged to erstwhile Kākarvāḍa village on the banks of river Krishna, which can be traced to be somewhere near the present day Mangalagiri. As a ācārya, he too placed forth his theory of Vedānta, purely based on Vedas, Brahma Sūtras, Bhagavad Gītā and Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa. His theory is known as Śuddhādvaita Brahmavāda, also known as Sākāra Brahmavāda. The term Brahmavāda means doctrine regarding Brahma. Vallabhācārya's Brahmavāda is called as Śuddhādvaita, meaning realistic non dualism. This Śuddhādvaita adjective refers to that form of Brahma which is not afflicted by the illusionary Maya^[1]. Brahma, the supreme authority, is all powerful, omniscient and omnipresent. Vallabhācārya says that Brahma is Saguṇa and Sākāra, but his form and attributes are not worldly. He has divine attributes and divine bliss as his form. This Brahma, on his wish can also be Nirguṇa or Nirākāra. This is so possible as Brahma has a special attribute called Viruddhadharmāśraya, possessing contradictory attributes.

Brahma is not only the creator of universe but also the material cause. The whole universe is created out of Brahma just as ornaments are created out of gold. The complete universe, including animate and inanimate world, is a form of Brahma and therefore, as real as Brahma. Vallabhācārya strongly denies the fact that the world is illusionary. According to him each and every part of the world is nothing but Brahma. This concept of Śuddhādvaita Brahmavāda which is embedded in Upaniśads is now accepted as a scientific theory regarding the origin of universe.

The focus of this research is on finding and analyzing these concepts of Brahmavāda in science and other ancient philosophies. I could extend my research only up to Zoroastrian and Egyptian Philosophy, but a further research into various other philosophies would throw more light upon the universality of Brahmavāda.

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Brahmavāda in science

The famous physicist Allan Guth's 1980 theory, called Big Bang Theory, states that-'Around 13.7 million years ago everything in the entire universe was condensed in an infinitesimally small singularity, point of infinite denseness and heat.

Suddenly, an explosive expansion began, ballooning our universe outwards faster than the speed of light ^[3]. Similarly Vallabhācārya says that the complete Universe has evolved out of the Infinite power called Brahma. The Supreme Being, whom Vallabhācārya declares as Kṛṣṇa, is the creator of the universe himself and he himself becomes the universe ^[4].

The manifestation of universe from Brahmāṇḍa, also called as cosmic egg in scientific terminology, is well mentioned in Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa. It says- Then, urged by God's power, they combined with one another and, assuming between themselves the role of cause and its effects, produced both the cosmic and individual body. The macrocosm in the form of an egg lay on the casual waters in a lifeless condition for a thousand years. With the help of time as well as of the destiny and the innate disposition of the individual souls, however, at end of this period the Lord (who is the life giver of all) infused life into this egg. Bursting open that (cosmic) egg, issued there from the same Supreme Person ^[5].

The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣada mentions exactly what Big Bang Theory states- All the life, worlds, Deities (divine objects), complete creation explodes from Ātmā (Brahma) just like sparks explode from fire ^[6].

The Rig Veda also gives a description of the same kind regarding the emergence of universe. It clearly states that the universe (virāṭa) emerged in the Supreme Being called Puruṣa. The complete universe is only a quarter part of the Supreme Being. Other three quarters are in the space unperceivable by us. This shows the magnificence of the Brahma ^[7].

All these statements clearly point towards one fact that the complete universe is created by an unknown force, which Sanātana Dharma calls, as Brahma. It is not only created by Brahma, but it is the Brahma himself that has taken the form of the universe. But there is more to it. Brahma doesn't get itself exhausted in creating the universe. Ṛgveda says He is far more than the universe we know. Even the science has not been able to zero upon the vastness of the universe, nor a perfect theory regarding its creation. But it definitely accepts a force, which it sometimes calls as a gravitational pull, or a black hole, as an unknown source of energy. The science says- The star collapses under the pull of its gravity until nothing, not even light, can escape. It becomes a black hole.... astronomers believe, of material being compressed and heated before it is sucked in ^[8].

We can correlate this black hole, which is an epicentre of force, with the Brahma, which is force of forces, and described in Rig Veda as a Dense Darkness before the creation of universe (tamasā gūḍham) ^[9].

We can, thus, say that the Supreme Force called Brahma is evident in all the findings of scientific research. Though the scientists hesitate to accept the entity of Brahma, they do accept Brahma, but as an unusual force or power.

Brahma, in Upaniṣads, is mentioned into two, seemingly contradictory, ways. Sometimes the Upaniṣads mention Brahma as unperceivable and beyond description. Later, they also mention Brahma as perceivable and describable. Almost all the ācāryas of Vedānta take either of the stands of the Upaniṣads, but Vallabhācārya says that both the statements of

Upaniṣads are equally true. It is quite possible for Brahma to be perceivable and unperceivable at the same time. This is so possible because Brahma has a special attribute called Viruddhadharmāśraya. He is Almighty, therefore there can be nothing restricting or binding upon him. He is unperceivable as long as he doesn't want himself to be revealed. But if he wants to reveal himself in front of his devotees no power can stop him from doing so. According to Śaṅkarācārya, as well as Baudhdhas, Brahma is unperceivable and beyond description. Rāmānujācārya declares Brahma to be perceivable and describable.

Apart from Indian philosophies, other ancient philosophies such as Zoroastrian and Egyptian also have similar philosophical concepts of Brahmavāda. We have seen two facets of Brahmavāda- the one describing Brahma as perceivable and the other describing Brahma as unperceivable. Out of these, the Zoroastrian philosophy considers Brahma as perceivable where has the Egyptian philosophy considers Him to be unperceivable. An attempt is being made to correlate the philosophy of these two religions with the Bhāratīya Darśana specifically in the light of Brahmavāda.

Brahmavāda in Zoroastrianism

Avesta is the prime book of Zoroastrian religion. Though the Vedic religion and Zoroastrian religion are miles apart, if we closely observe our Vedas and Avesta, we can find many similarities. Zoroastrianism strongly supports Brahmavāda, that is, the true entity of the Supreme Being in many forms. The relation between the two scriptures is so close that with a little deviation in the pronunciation of Ṛgveda would seem like the recitation of Avesta and vice versa ^[10]. We find many terminological similarities between Avesta and Ṛgveda. For example we have the word Ahura in Avesta against Asura in Ṛgveda. Similarly Verethraghna in Avesta is Vṛtraghna in Ṛgveda meaning Indra, the killer of Vṛtra. Amerdad in Avesta correlates to Amṛtāt in Vedas.

Though terminologically we may not be able to correlate all the Gods in Avesta with that of Ṛgveda, but if we go into a research, we may find many Gods closely related to the deities of Ṛgveda functionally. The Ahura in Avesta is Asura in Ṛgveda, but Ahura is Supreme God (Brahma) according to Avesta, where as Asura means a demon. But Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Aranyaka calls Viṣṇu by the name Asura ^[11]. Another deity in Avesta is Khshathira which is none other than the creator, Brahmā. Though the term Khshathira doesn't match with Brahmā but functionally it performs all the duties of Brahmā. In fact the term Khshathira can also be related to Brahmā. Out of the three guṇas emerging out of Brahma, Brahmā is considered to be the deity of Rajo Guṇa. Similarly out of the four varṇas, kṣatriya is considered to be a by product of Rajo Guṇa. Basic feature of Rajo Guṇa is action and motion which directly corresponds with the Kṣatriya varṇa. Therefore, Khshathira resembles Brahmā. Similarly there is another deity in Avesta by the name Vahu Mano which directly corresponds with Shiva ^[12].

The name of the God Ahura Mazda consists of two words, Ahura and Mazda. Ahura means spirit or Paramātmā in Sanātana Dharma, where as Mazda means matter. Therefore, their God Ahura Mazda is both, Paramātmā as well as the Jagat or universe. It is a clear cut case of Śuddhādvaita Brahmavāda, where in Brahma, the Supreme Being, known as Paramātmā manifests Himself into the universe. There are two more facets of Ahura Mazda, Amritat and Haurvatat. This Amritat is nothing but Amṛtāt in the Vedas. It means

immortality. Similarly Haurvatat denotes the concept of wholeness and perfection. Both the facets are described as attributes of Brahma in the Upaniṣads. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada says- इदम् अमृतम् इदं ब्रह्म इदं सर्वम्. (3/5/1) Similarly there are three forms of Ahura Mazda denoting the Vedic deities Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva^[13].

Ahura Mazda created the earth and He stayed in the heaven^[14]. This is said in Rgveda thus- द्यावाभूमौ जनयन् देवः एकः (Rgveda 10/81/3). Ahura Mazda created Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu. Spenta Mainyu is the good spirit and Angra Mainyu is the bad or evil spirit. These can be associated with knowledge and ignorance. As both of these are created by the God, these can be assumed to be his power. This concept is said by Vallabhācārya as- knowledge and ignorance are the powers of God^[15]. Both knowledge and ignorance are complementary to each other, because gaining knowledge is coming out of ignorance, therefore if there is no ignorance, there is no scope of knowledge. Similarly ignorance cannot be proved to be ignorance unless there is a corresponding knowledge to prove it. Upaniṣads say that one should know the knowledge and ignorance both. With ignorance crossing the death, one could gain immortality with knowledge^[16].

From the above readings it can clearly be inferred that Brahma is described in Avesta as in Vedas. Therefore, according to Avesta, Brahma is perceivable and describable. We have also seen that the concept of Brahma in Avesta is very close to the description of Brahma we find in Upaniṣads. They also believe Brahma (Ahura Mazda) to be the creator of the universe. He rules the universe by taking many forms. He himself has created vidyā and avidyā in the forms of Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu. The Jīva is supposed to move towards Spenta Mainyu and distance himself from Angra Mainyu. Thus, we can declare that Zarathustra was a staunch Brahmavādi.

Brahmavāda in Egyptian philosophy

The source of Egyptian philosophy is its pyramids and mummies. But the language used in the pyramids was not deciphered for a long time as it was in the form of pictures and drawings. But after excavation of Rock inscription in Babylonia wherein the ancient Egyptian language was written along with Babylonian and Armenian language, the Egyptian language could be somewhat deciphered. Later on, after great efforts by many scholars, Egyptian script in the form of pictures is now understandable. Therefore, we now have a good volume of Egyptian philosophy at our disposal.

The basic principle of Egyptian cosmology is the Primeval Waters. It is common to all the accounts of the origin of the universe, however much they may differ in detail. 'Every creation myth assumes that before the beginning of things the Premordial Abyss of waters was everywhere, stretching endlessly in all directions. It was not like a sea, for that has a surface, where as the original waters extended above as well as below. There was no region of air or visibility; all was dark and formless^[17]'.

This same concept is reflected in Vedas. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa says regarding the Primeval Waters- आपो ह वा इदम् अग्रे सलिलमेव आस (1/6/1). The Rgveda declares regarding the darkness thus- न असद् आसीद् नो सद् आसीत् तमः आसीत् तमसा गूढम् (10/11/129/1-3).

The Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Taittirīya Aranyaka says that from this Primeval Waters, there emerged a tortoise, which was the form of Brahma^[18]. According to Egyptian philosophy a goose appeared from the ocean^[19]. We can find the perfect

paraphrasing between the Vedas and Egyptian philosophy. This is the beauty of Brahmavāda that it can be traced in many philosophies and sciences.

The Egyptian concept of Brahma (called as Atum) - Atum was first alone in the universe. He was the only God but all things to come. He was eternity the creator of millions. Atum was creator, so he proceeded to playing with self in Haliopolis^[20].

The Supreme Being and the creator of the universe, according to Egyptian philosophy, is Atum which is very near to Ātmā in Indian philosophy. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada says that this Ātmā was there at first- आत्मैव इदम् अग्रे आसीत् (1/4/1). It started to play with itself hence it was called Ātmārām or Ātmarati. It further says, that the Brahma did not want to play alone he wished for the second. He divided himself into two that became as a husband and wife^[21]. In the Egyptian philosophy, 'Atum was unhappy in Primeval Waters, he had no companion when my name came into existence^[22]'.

The creation of the universe - According to Egyptians, the creation of the universe started by the spitting of Atum. From the spat of the Atum, the deities Shu and Tefnut were born. Rundle Clark says, 'Another myth accounted for Shu and Tefnut by having spat forth from the creator's mouth... You spat forth as Shu, you expectorated as a Tefnut, you put your arms around them in an act of Ka-giving, so that your Ka might be in them^[23]'. We can find a similar concept in Vedas in the process of creation, wherein, the creator is said to have performed a sacrifice by sacrificing his own body fat^[24]. The Upaniṣads also give example of the universe being created by the saliva of a spider^[25]. However, they give the instance as an example to explain the fact that God is the creator, instrumental and the material cause of the universe. It says, just as the spider creates a web from his own self, without any external matter, in the same way Brahma creates the universe. It doesn't hold the meaning terminologically. It is quite possible that the Egyptian philosophy also might have illustrated the instance of spitting with the same intention.

The Shu, which has been created by the god, represents dry air and light. Similarly, the Tefnut represents moist air, moisture and rain. Rundle Clark says, 'From the two acts came Shu, the space, the light cavity in the midst of the primordial darkness. Shu is both light and air, and as the offspring of God he is manifest life. As light he separates the earth from the sky and as air he upholds the sky vault^[26]'. We find the same concept of air being the conjunction of space and earth in Upaniṣads. Taittirīya Upaniṣada says- पृथिवी पूर्वरूपं द्यौः उत्तररूपं वायुः सन्धानम्. (1/3/1).

These are just a few examples of the parallelism of the Vedas and Egyptian Philosophy. As a limitation of the research, only the concepts till the creation of the universe is studied, but a detailed research into the subject will definitely reveal more interesting similarities between both the philosophies. The main purpose of this exercise is to assess the vastness and projection of the central idea of the Vedānta, the true form of Brahma, known as Brahmavāda (the doctrine of Brahma). By examining the above facts of Egyptian Philosophy, we can boldly declare that it is a Brahmavāda philosophy, wherein the God as a creator has been discussed in great detail.

Conclusion

We can hereby, conclude that the basic concepts of Upanishads, brought forth by Vallabhacharya as Brahmavad, are not only confined to Vedas, but are universal in nature. This throws light upon the fact that the Ultimate Reality is the

same in all the philosophies and sciences. Though there may be some differences in the way of presenting, fables and examples, the basic truth is same.

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