



Research Article

ONTO-COSMOLOGY: RAMANUJA AND SIRHINDI

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ABSTRACT

The problem of synthesis and reconciliation of the Ramanuja and Sirhindi is a vital significance and importance and no thinking mind can deliberately neglect it. These two philosophers have been forced to tackle the same problem and in solving them, their methods and hypotheses have been noticeably similar. Ramanuja takes the Upanisadic descriptions of creation; he holds that God, who is omnipotent, creates the manifold world out of Himself by a gracious act of will. Brahman is the only reality in the universe in the sense that outside or independent of God there is no other reality. On the other hand, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi asserts that; we cannot know God through kashf-o-shuhud or intuition and mystic experience. He discusses dhat-o-sifat or the being and the attributes of God. God is beyond all such asma-o-sifat or names and attributes as can be comprehended by us. God the Holy One is beyond the Beyond, again beyond the Beyond and the world is the zill or effect of His sifat or attributes. The present paper shall be an attempt to describe the concept of Onto-Cosmology in Ramanuja and Sirhindi; that will break new ground(s) and open new views for oriental inquiry. Modern oriental inquiry hardly knows anything about these two philosophers, so the purpose of this paper will be; bring to light on the concept of Ontology and Cosmology in Ramanuja and Sirhindi to find out new dimensions. This study will also examine and highlight new concepts, methodologies and perspectives around the philosophy of these two great philosophers. It will also enhance our knowledge through the proposal of critical analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The comparative philosophy and religion have gained prevalence from the beginning of the twentieth century and may not thus be said to have been lately born, they are, as a matter of fact, as old as human civilization itself (Raju, 1963). Man has been religious from the very beginning of civilization and anthropologists have held the view that there have been different systems of religion in the different parts of the world. These religious systems presume a view of reality and the understanding of men and their nature and their place of function in the scheme of the universe (Jevons, 1985). It can thus clearly seen that the comparative philosophy and religion are at any rate their motives and functions were not relatively unknown to religious believers and thinkers and were matters in which they were deeply interested (Sharpe, 1986). The history of comparative philosophy and religion, therefore, if at all it has to be rewritten and if we must think such an attempt must be made some time afterwards, points to the recognition even in such earliest times of the attempts made at international understanding and mutual sympathy at least on the cultural

fronts of religion and philosophy (Ulrich, 2009). There is no doubt that the scholar(s) of comparative philosophy and religion who is/are interested in the unity of mankind at the present time must draw his/their inspiration(s) from such stimulating records of the cultural history of mankind. Philosophy is essentially the study of the intellectual assumptions of civilization and culture. Philosophers are the custodians of those central values, ideals and aspirations of mankind which promote civilization and culture (Robert, 2009). As Archie John Bahm very sensibly remarks; "civilization itself is a product of philosophy, even as it, in turn, produces philosophy". Towards the fulfilment and consummation of this great ideal, this great enterprise in intellectual cooperative in the form of the study of comparative philosophy and religion doubtless marks a great step (Devaraja, 1967). There is no doubt that of all the different methods of mutual cooperation in social, political and economic spheres that in philosophy and religion will prove to be the most wholesome and contributory to the welfare of mankind (Raju, 1992). In fact, all problems in the last option meet in the different spheres (Liat, 1951). The control and regulation of human thinking is the greatest need of the hour. This is possible only through the encouragement of the disciplines whose only interest is focused on man. There is no other discipline or branch of learning more than human philosophy and religion, and they can become dearer to the

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human heart if they are enriched and deepened by cooperation of the different patterns of thinking. It is from this point of view, consequently, that studies in comparative philosophy and religion have acquired some meaning in these days and have become more charming and attractive if there should be any attempt towards a comparative study of the two great philosophers and theologians like Ramanuja and Sirhindi, and shall assuredly be one such small and humble venture in this direction.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily intended to comprehend the concept of Ontology and Cosmology in Ramanuja and Sirhindi. The purpose is to demonstrate, identify, re-evaluate and, finally, find out the new dimensions in Ramanuja's and Sirhindi's ideas. This study uses rational content investigation, directed by a hermeneutic approach, analytic approach, and phenomenological approach. I used qualitative research methods because they are predominantly effectual for investigating and elucidating how things were/are.

Onto-Cosmology: Ramanuja and Sirhindi

Ramanuja takes the Upanisadic descriptions of creation; he holds that God, who is omnipotent, creates the manifold world out of Himself by a gracious act of will. Within the All-inclusive God (Brahman) there are both unconscious matter (acit) and the finite spirits (cit) (Chatterjee and Datta, 2007). The first is the source of the material objects as such called prakrti. Ramanuja believes that prakrti is a part of God and controlled by God just as the human body is controlled from within by the human soul. During the state of dissolution (pralaya) this primal unconscious nature of prakrti remains in a latent, subtle and differentiated form (Hiriyanna, 1949). God creates out of this the world of diverse objects in accordance with the deeds of the souls in the world prior to the last dissolution. Impelled by the omnipotent will of God the undifferentiated subtle matter gradually becomes transformed into three kinds of subtle elements; fire, water and earth. These differentiated elements manifest also the three kinds of qualities known as sattva, rajas and tamas (Everett, 1899). Gradually the three subtle elements become mixed up together and give rise to all gross objects which we perceive in the material world. God, according to Ramanuja, is the Absolute Reality possessed of two integral parts, matter and the finite spirits (Radhakrishnan, 1923). Brahman is the only reality in the universe in the sense that outside or independent of God there is no other reality. But God contains within Himself the material objects as well as the finite souls which are real. The Absolute One contains the many. This monism of Ramanuja is known, thus, as Visistadvaita which means the Unity (advaita) of Brahman possessed (visista) of real parts (the conscious and the unconscious). It is not a distinction-less unity (Sharma, 1960). Three types of distinction (bheda) are generally distinguished by the Vedantins. The distinction that anything, for instance; a cow has from things of other classes, such as horses, asses, is called heterogeneous distinction (vijatiya-bheda). The distinction that one cow has from another cow (i.e., an object of the same class) is called homogeneous distinction (sajatiya-bheda). In addition to these two kinds of external distinctions, there is a third kind, i.e., internal distinction (svagata-bheda), which exists within an object, between its different parts, such as between the tail and the legs of the same cow. In the light of this threefold

classification of distinctions, Ramanuja holds that Brahman is devoid of the two kinds of external distinctions because there is nothing besides God, either similar or dissimilar to Him (Dasgupta, 1922). But God is possessed of internal distinctions, as there are within Him different conscious and unconscious substances which can be mutually distinguished. Therefore, God is not characterless (nirguna), nor indeterminate, but possessed of qualities (saguna) (Sharma, 2006). These different explanations of Ramanuja show that we cannot understand every aspect of the relation between God and world with the help of any analogy. We can only try to understand each aspect in the light of one particular type of experience (Hiriyanna, 1993). In fact no metaphor claims to resemble the thing compared in every respect and it is extremely difficult to find in the ordinary region of experience anything bearing even partial resemblance to God, a unique reality, which can be directly known in religious experience or indirectly from the testimony of those who have realised God. So Ramanuja stresses much on the authority of scriptures rather than inferences regarding God, the inadequacy of which he tries to expose with the enthusiasm of a sceptic (Frauwallner, 1973).

Sirhindi is a Sunni reformer and mystic in India, and a member of the Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah (Order) (Weismann, 2007). His letters had great influence, helping spread his reputation outside India into Afghanistan and Central Asia. His disciples, known as Mujaddidis, did much to spread his beliefs in reform (Siddique, 2011). In the field of mysticism, he advocated replacing pantheism with a notion of the "unity of worship" which did not rely on viewing all objects in the world as divine (Lim, 2012). Now I proceed, the conception of Tawhid as advanced by Sirhindi (Mujaddid) himself is this; we cannot know God through kashf-o-shuhud or intuition and mystic experience. Hence, we should revert to Revelation and to 'Ulama-i-zahir' or divines, because their conception is derived direct from Revelation. Thus, Sirhindi discusses dhat-o-sifat or the being and the attributes of God on the principles of Muslim theologians; and there he follows not the Asharite School but the Mutazilite (Faruqi, 1940). As I have mentioned formerly, that Sirhindi passed through wujudiyyat or unityism and reached zilliyat or adumbration where the error involved in wujudiyyat was revealed to him; and after zilliyat or adumbration, he attained the stage of abdiyyat or servitude. At this stage he is so thoroughly convinced of error of wujudiyyat or unityism that he feels himself compelled to criticize it emphatically. It is at this stage that he clearly realizes that mystical experience has no objective validity with regards to dhat-o-sifat or the being and attributes of God (Kartal, 2013). Consequently, he confesses to the following negative attributes or characteristics of the Divine Being. God is beyond all such asma-o-sifat or names and attributes as can be comprehended by us. He is beyond all shuyun-o-i'ti'arat or modes and relations, beyond all zuhur-o-butun or externalization and internalization, beyond all buruz-o-kumun or projection and introjections, beyond all mawsul-o-mafsul or realizable and explicable, beyond all kashfo-shuhud or mystic intuition and experience; nay even beyond all mahsus-o-ma'qul or empirical and rational, and beyond all mawhum-o-muta-khayyal or conceivable and imaginable; "He the Holy One is beyond the Beyond, again beyond the Beyond. Whatever is known is through mystic intuition is merely a subjective experience, without any objective validity whatsoever. In short, God can never be apprehended through mystical experience. Therefore,

Iman-b'il-ghaib or faith in the unseen is unavoidable. Such a tired in their useless efforts and it becomes evident that God is unapproachable, inexperience-able, inexplicable and unknowable. Such a faith alone is valid in His case, because it is in keeping with our limitations and His unapproachable-ness or Beyond-ness. As regards the relations between the dhat or being and the sifat or attributes of God on the one hand and between dhat-o-sifat and the world on the other, Sirhindi maintains that His sifat or attributes are other than and in addition to His dhat or being, and that the world is the zill or effect of His sifat or attributes. The problem really is a problem of theology (Sharif, 1966). According to him the sifat or attributes are the Azlal or effects of the sifat or attributes (Sirhindi, 2010). The gradation or order of these tanazzulat-ota'yyunat or the azlal in the system of Sirhindi is that the 'Perfect Being' is the cause of the quality of Wujud or existence, then follows the sifat-i-hayat or the quality of life, because life is not imaginable without existence. After life comes the sifat-i-ilm or the quality of knowledge; after knowledge sifat-i-qudrat the quality of power, and after power sifat-i-iradah or the quality of will; after will the sifat-i-sam or the quality of hearing; after hearing the sifat-i-kalam or the quality of speech; and after speech, the sifat-itakwain or the quality of creation is the same cause of the creation of the world; the world is its zill, i.e., its effect and not its tajalli, i.e., its mode (Faruqi, 1940). These attributes of God are over and above the being of God, for the 'Perfect Being' brings them into existence one by one for the sake of creation of the world; the gradation is logical. It is by means of these attributes which He adds to His being that the 'Perfect Being' who is sufficient unto Himself and needs nothing, turns to the creation of the world and creates it (Kartal, 2013).

Epilogue

Précis of this comparative study of Ramanuja and Sirhindi's conceptions of Onto-Cosmology, my submissions are that, between the two philosophers there is a concurrence on the business of Ontology and Cosmology, and also on unity being the central character of Reality. It cannot be said that the approach to the issue(s) of reality by these two philosophers has been only speculative and a priori. We have learnt from the treatment of the fundamental issues which Sirhindi faced and undertaken regarding God and World, that Ramanuja several centuries prior to him, solved the same issues in a similar way. Therefore, for both philosophers, the world has a first cause, which is God. Nevertheless, they may have come to relatively different conclusions but the difference may be shown to have sprung not so much from their starting points as from the inconsistent and incoherent application of their principles due surely to their basic differences in outlook, of which they may not have been conscious in the elaboration of the details of their constructive metaphysics. Ramanuja's deeply religious insight to be revolting to religious consciousness, religion for him, was the affirmation of the eternal values of God, world and the individual soul which could not be filled away in the abyss of the Impersonal Absolute. On the other hand, Sirhindi states that God is Wujud-ikamilah or the Perfect Being, comprehending all sifat-i-kamilah or attributes of perfection in His essence and He decides to create the world.

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