

ADVAITAVADA VERSUS SPINOZA'S MONISM

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Abstract It is to be noted that both Brauch Spinoza and Shamkara of Advaitavaidins have talked about the *Reality* to be One. Spioza called it Substance whereas Shamkara called it Brahman. According to both all other things fall into this one real entity. Everything emerges from that reality and returns to that reality. We are all temporally real, but Substance or Brahman is really real. Just as the waves are temporary truth amidst the eternal expansion of ocean. The Advaitins have termed us, the creation of Brahman as Maya and Spinoza termed us as the Modes or modifications of Substance. The Advaitins add that during modification we have become unreal, as per Shamkara although Advaitavadins Ramanuja consider us as Real. Sree Ramakrishna Paramhansa states that we are like those stairs which help us to reach the roof-made up of the same components of roof yet not roof. Both Advaitavadins and Spinoza would agree that we are nothing but the parts of the One whole, or its reflection. Advaitavadins further believe that the same Brahman is present in all of us unanimously, so does Spinoza accord that thought and extension the two Attributes of the Reality is present in all of us. If that be the case then we must forget about the differences amongst each other and live in peace and harmony only to make the world a better place to live in.

Index Terms- Brahman, Modes, Maya, Substance

INTRODUCTION

The world is made of different categories (Padārthas), among which Dravya or Substance is one which is considered to be the container of all 'qualities' and 'actions'. And such Dravya / Substance had been widely discussed in both East and West, in the World of Philosophy. But the philosophers differ in their opinion in admitting their numbers. Descartes the father of modern philosophy believed in two Substances—Absolute and Relative. Spinoza, another rationalist believed that Substance has to be that which embraces all perfections and discard any imperfection. Thus to him "Existence" an important essence of perfection should be attributed to the definition of Substance. Once it is done then there is no need to accept other substances which also exist, as in that case all such existing substances would possess the same essence of 'existence' and therefore we would fail to differentiate one from another. Thus Spinoza admitted of One Substance which should be complete, all perfect hence would form the Ultimate Reality—which he termed as God.

The Advaitavādins while discussing the ultimate truth of this creation from which everything else was created, to which everything else returns—had also considered of only one reality (as two would frustrate the notion of 'Ultimatum')—and that they termed as Brahman. So like Spinoza, the Advaitavādins of the Indian soil, some thousands of years ago had already spoke of only One Ultimate Substance called Brahman. To them the rest of this creation is Māyā or illusion which is nothing but modification of the Brahman. According to Brahmvivartanavāda (Śamkara) due to Evolution or several process of changes

True Brahman has become false Jagat but to the Brahmapariṇāmvādins (Rāmānuja) the world is as true as Brahman, as it is the effect of Brahman¹.

Spinoza in West also thought on those lines that apart from the Ultimate Substance God, the rest is His modification thus he termed us (His Creation) as modes which are temporarily real (if not false) whereas God is Really Real.

Such a similarity between Advaita Vedāntins; and Spinoza's Substance is quite intriguing indeed to draw a comparison amongst their thoughts.

1. Neither Brahman nor God: are affected by the 'temporary'

We the creation of Brahman, termed as Māyā by the Advaitavādins is not false but Māyā hides the reality. Similarly modes as accepted by Spinoza are not false but they also guard the true nature of the Ultimate Substance—God. As the magician does not get fooled by his own tricks, similarly God is not affected by His temporarily real creation; just as Brahman, as the Vedāntins believe does not get affected by Māyā although Brahman is its creator.

2. Guṇas of Brahman, Attributes of God—Subjective as well as Objective

The Guṇas of Saguṇa Brahman are there in Brahman but we also have a role to acquire them, depending on our samaskāras. In other words how much or how accurately can we derive the guṇas of Brahman depends on us to a great extent. The more we obtain knowledge of Brahman, closer can we come to it and more would be the expansion of sat, chit and ānanda in us (which are also guṇas of Brahman). Similarly the attributes of Spinoza's God (the Ultimate Substance) are not merely objective but also depends on the subject modes for their complete manifestation. Just as a red band of police cap has a component in it which can illuminate but it would shine only when external light would fall on it.

3. The Māyā or mode merges with Brahman or God in the end

The Vedāntins gave the analogy of Ghatākāśa which is the empty space remaining bound by the ghata but once the ghata is broken the limited ākāśa gets out and mixes with Bibhu ākāśa. This analogy was given to compare the Jivātmān remaining bound in the finite body, but once the body is perished in death then that ātmān has the potency to merge with Brahman (the pure form of infinite and eternal consciousness).

Similarly Spinoza believed that after completing their journey the modes also merge with the Ultimate Substance from which they emanate.

4. Brahman as well as God give shelter to evil

Like Brahman, Spinoza's Substance—God also gives shelter to both good and evil (as both are one complete reality, hence they must entail in them both good as well as evil, as found in the creation) but neither Brahman nor God has imperfection or impurity or any negative potency as their essence. Giving shelter to evil and being evil himself— are two different things. Like a man who is pure and saintly can give shelter to criminals at his house even without being affected by any of their evil potencies.

5. Brahman or God – Inactive, Ívara or Infinite Mode Active

The Advaitavādins have accepted not only of Brahman but also of Ívara² who unlike Brahman is active. Similarly God (the Ultimate Substance of Spinoza) is passive, He does not have to work towards completing an action but such acts are performed by the Infinite Modes—a layer admitted by Spinoza between the Ultimate Substance and the finite modes. But the question arises, how can Brahman or God be inactive even after being complete and the world of illusion or modes be active even after being incomplete? The answer would be that Brahman or God wills and the action is completed, they do not have to work for its execution unlike us.

6. Māyā or Mode are qualitatively same but quantitatively different from Brahman

Spinoza has admitted that qualitatively God and modes are same; as modes are nothing but modifications of God so their quality cannot change but quantitatively they differ as the modes can only accommodate in them the two qualities among many of God (i.e., thought and extension—termed by Spinoza as 'attributes'). Finite minds are modes of that One Substance God under the attribute of thought and Finite bodies are modes of God under the attribute of extension³. The Advaitavādins at the same breath state that qualitatively the Brahman as well as us are similar (Tat Tvam asi) but the sat (existence), chit (consciousness) and ānanda (bliss) of Brahman are quantitatively much more in expansion and are never limited but such guṇas in us get destroyed with or even before completion of our present life. Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa who was an Advaita Vedāntin, states that the roof and stairs both are made of same components such as bricks, cement and sand but both are not same, as there is a difference of expansion (that is of quantity if not quality).

7. *Māyā or Modes: required to reach to Brahman or God*

One thing we must remember that the stairs are very important to reach the roof, similarly modes or Māyā (Jagat) are equally important for reaching to the Ultimate Substance or to Brahman respectively. Thus they also play an important role and their worth cannot be discarded by labeling them as ‘false’ or ‘unreal’. They are ‘Temporarily Real’ and God or Brahman is ‘Really Real’. Just as the waves of sea rise and fall being ‘temporarily real’ but not false as they do exist even if for sometime, whereas the sea is found at all times, existing eternally—an analogy given by Erdmann to differentiate, at the same time bind the two.

8. *We are free yet not so according to Advaitavādins as well Spinoza*

Regarding freedom of will Spinoza states that modes are functioned by the strings pulled by the Ultimate Substance – God⁴. Thus any of their personal efforts would go in vain. It is something like before a surgery the patient is subject to anesthesia and while receiving it, many put efforts to hold back their consciousness in the fear of losing it. If we say at that juncture that the patient has free will then his will would work well only up to that point where he poses his efforts to sustain his senses but ultimately the will of the doctor endures. But we have to remember that both the doctor as well as God has plans which would fetch ultimate good results, but their means seem to be hard (that is, surgery in case of patients and sufferings in case of modes for their Vikarmas). The Advaitavādins also maintain a similar stance. Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa gave the example of a cow who can freely circumbulate only up to a particular space beyond which it would feel the pull of the rope tying it to the tree. Brahman can give us sufferings but they are like punishments of teachers and guardians given to children to make them walk in the right path of life. Both God and Brahman are all powerful and benevolent too, then can they not remove our sufferings; when they are said to love us unconditionally—the question can come to our minds. It is seen from lives of many saintly people that by loving Him or following instructions of God or Brahman (from scriptures) their sufferings have been lessened or even removed as by the will of almighty everything is possible because He is the one who makes, breaks and amends rules in the entire creation.

9. *Duality— Leela of Brahman, pleasure of God*

In Pantheism where Substance is said to be in Himself (Natura Naturans) in Spinoza’s language as well as in His creation (Natura Naturata)—[Just as water is found in it and everywhere around it when a pot is completely immersed in pond]; here when everything can be reduced to one entity then why did creation with its manifold diversities appear at all—the question might arise. This is, what according to the Indian

Philosophers (Advaitavādins) is “Leela” of the Brahman and Spinoza would call it as ‘Joy’ of the God. To discard the sense of solitude and mundanity Brahman or God decided to create the world with multiple entities—each species differing from the other. The sufferings or evils were found as by-products created due to the misdeeds of these entities. But once these entities who traverse in this world for lives after lives can overcome their Prarabdha Karma and Sanchita Karma of their past lives by facing them and can continue with Nishkāmakarma (not having desire to enjoy the fruits of actions), it is only then they can be one with Brahman—as believed by the Advaitavādins. Spinoza also believed that the modes were created by the God spontaneously (just as a river flows spontaneously from the mountain top without any conscious effort of the hill) for His own necessity to enjoy the glory of His creation. The creator derives joy from his creation thus duality was required. Hence Sādhaka Ram Prasad in one of his songs praising the unconditional love of the Divine mother stated that ..Ami chini hote chai na, chini khete chai.(I do not want to be sugar myself but want to taste its sweetness).

But both the Advaitavādins as well as Spinoza knew that such a duality is Adhyāsa or our temporary ignorance.

10. Both sacrificed many at the cost of One

Last but not the least both the Advaitavādins as well as Spinoza sacrificed many at the cost of One (which like a vacuum cleaner absorbs all and reduce them to it). And such Ultimate One and only One Reality is termed as Brahman by the Advaita Vedāntins and known as God to Spinoza.

CONCLUSION

Thus both talk on same lines making us wonder whether the Dutch philosopher Brauch Spinoza of 17th century had been inspired by Advaitavāda (400-450 C.E) of Indian philosophy and then formulated his Pantheism. The answer is not known to me. But if this simple philosophy of oneness is understood by all, then the world would no more remain a turbulent place to live in.

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