



The Concept of God: A Comparative Study of Ramanuja, Spinoza, and Ibn- Arabi

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ABSTRACT: Each religious group follows the code of conduct and beliefs prescribed in their respective religion. They can't transgress these beliefs as it is considered a sin. So each religion in this world acknowledges the concept of God that is eternal and unchanging. In this paper, I will deal with comparative discussion about the Ibn- Arabi's Islamic concept of God and as Muslim believes God is omnipotent, omniscient and transcendent. It cannot be grasped as an ordinary man as it needs a spiritual and Sufi aspect. This paper also discusses about the Ramanuja's concept of God in vedanta school (Hinduism) and also tries to focus on the real nature of individual selves and reality of individual selves and their distinctness from Brahman. And lastly, I will talk about the Spinoza's concept of God. The present paper comparatively analyses all the three philosophers' and their approaches to reality.

Keywords: Ultimate reality, God, Substance, Pantheism, Hinduism, Islam.

Religion involves an exceptional place in philosophy since it has an equivocal reason: one the one hand, the aim of this religion is, the clarification of the celestial standard, the revelation of the human nature and its predetermination. The idea of God is the fundamental principle of all religions. We can also see that in light of the fact established religions like Buddhism and Jainism don't hold the belief in an Absolute Creator of the world. Religious scholars generally characterize that God as almighty, all-knowing, transcendent, eternal and infinite. We should see also that the unity of God is the focal piece of all religions. A large portion of the Hindus worship numerous gods and goddesses, however they trust that they

are the signs of the One Absolute Being. In Hinduism, the Upanishads are the fundamental philosophical treatises portraying the idea of the God and soul. According to Spinoza, the presence of God can at first be demonstrated as a posteriori (according to our experience). We realize that if something is non-existent, it exists and the other way around and that everything is resolved to existence or non-existence by a particular reason. So the meaning of Spinoza's God would be at first to demonstrate its reality, at that point to demonstrate that he has no reason and determines the world, and lastly to show his properties. Qur'an is the principle wellspring of religious philosophy accepted to be revealed from God to Prophet Muhammad. Qur'an focuses on the oneness of God and how individual should identify with Him.

Therefore, we will initially discuss about the idea of God according to Ramanuja in Hinduism. Hinduism is certainly not a unitary religion, yet a large number of religious and philosophical movements. In Hinduism, there are nine Vedic or Non-Vedic philosophical or religious schools, for example, Carvaka, Jainism, Buddhism, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta school. Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism are known as non-vedic school and Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta are known as vedic religion in Hindu philosophy or Indian Philosophy. In Hinduism, there are three primary patterns of the ultimate reality, which are, firstly, there is a henotheism, implies committed to one particular god out of others. The religion of the ancient vedas and the later Vaisnavism and Shaivism, they claim that many gods exist but only one which is more important than the others. Secondly, in Hindu religion, there is a pantheism, which implies the universe is a manifestation of God, these perspectives brought by the Upanisads and the later Vedanta. Thirdly, there is a dualism, which means two ultimate realities, these perspectives brought by the Sankhya and Yoga darsana of philosophy.

If we study of the Vedanta school's philosophy, then we see that Visistadvaita is one of the most popular school of Vedanta school of Indian philosophies. Vedanta actually implies the end of Vedas. Principally the word 'Vedanta' remained for Upanishads; afterward, its meaning augmented to incorporate all contemplation created out of the Upanisads.

Visistadvaita is a non-dualistic school of Vedanta philosophy. It is non-dualism of qualified whole, in which Brahman alone exist, yet characterized by multiplicity. It can be portrayed as qualified monism or attributive monism. It is a school of Vedanta philosophy which has faith in all diversity including to an underlying unity.

Ramanuja is the central advocate of qualified monism. Ramanuja endeavours to integrate Vaisnavism with the Vedanta. Visistadvaita acknowledges as the ultimate three entities of matter (acit), individual self (cit) and Isvara. Ramanuja concedes the individual self as a part of Brahman and furthermore concedes its ontological reality. Both cit and acit are naturally identified with Brahman and thusly Brahman is constantly connected with them/ both in the state of dissolution and also the condition of creation.

The only difference between the two states is that in the state of dissolution cit and acit are un-manifest or indistinguishable by name and form whereas in the state of creation they become distinguishable by name and form. (Chari, 1988, p.247)

Ramanuja has given us, for the first, time systematic forms of monotheism. As per him, Brahman is the most astounding reality, yet this Brahman is full of love. Ramanuja perceives soul as people has reality that cit and acit, what perceive and what does not perceive, soul and matter, form as it were the body of Brahman, are in fact modes of Brahman. Both cit and acit change from an inconspicuous shape to gross form. Change in soul and matter; in any case, does not occur in a similar way. While unconscious matter undergoes a change of its fundamental nature/ there is no such change of svarupa on account of souls.

It is the '*dharmabhutajnana*' of the individual souls that undergoes modification and passes from a state of absolute contraction to a state of expansion; the extent of which is determined by the law of karma. (Sengupta, 1967, p.159)

Matter are individual self are totally reliant on Isvara. The universal selves are the conscious selves as well as unconscious matter. Isvara controls matter and selves for His own purpose. Ramanuja maintains that the relation between the body and the self is

inseparable. The inseparable unity of matter, selves and Isvara constitutes the reality. According to him, it is not an external relation that merely connect them, but internal relation of inseparability that is called aprathaksiddhi. The individual selves evolve out of cit and physical world out of acit. The relation of aprathaksiddhi is a key concept in visistaadvaita Philosophy. Aprathaksiddhi is an inner, inseparable, vital, and organic relation. It is the relation between- 1. God and Jiva, 2. God and Jagat, 3. Substance and its attributes, and lastly 4. Parts and Whole.

According to Ramanuja, God is the soul of souls. He is also the soul of nature. He identified God with the absolute. He is the immanent inner controller, the supreme real. He holds together in unity the dependent matter and the souls are His attributes. They are the body of God who is their souls. Our souls are souls in relation to God, they become his body and He is their soul. They form this body and are inseparable forms and utterly dependent on Him. Matter and soul are called attributes of God. God is their substance, controller, supporter, the whole and the principal end. God is Brahman and Brahman according to Ramanuja is a qualified unity. God is Karana Brahman. He is the supreme cause and instrumental cause of the world. The finite self is not independent, it is dependent on God.

According to Ramanuja, Brahman is Savishesha. It is regarded as self with excellent attributes but is devoid of all evil qualities. Ramanuja maintains that the self can never become Brahman. It is only a part and an attributes can never become substance. God is inner substance. Though God is the inner self, both God and self are inseparable but in the sense of bare identity. He maintains that God is the supreme eternal soul among the eternal souls. So the souls are different from God. Though all souls are equally parts of God, some are regarded as pure and others are impure. The souls are atomic in size in relation to the supreme self. The different experience of the soul is samsaras are due to ignorance and karmas. According to Ramanuja God is the absolute reality possessed of matter and finite souls. Hence the absolute one contains many.

The transcendent God has His own divine life and Ramanuja holds that it with this anthropomorphic aspect of God that a freed soul enjoys communion which is the summum bonum of human life. (Bhardawaj, 1958, p.70)

This monism of Ramanuja is called Visistadvaita. He is infinite and not limited by space, time and other objects. He is the creator preserver and destroyer of the world. He controls the entire universe of conscious souls and unconsciousness matter which are His powers, parts, manifestations, forms, attributes or modes.

Baruch Spinoza's after death published *Ethics* is a standout amongst the most powerful and methodical works of present day philosophical idea. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza shows the presence of God, yet his conception of God is drastically different from the anthropomorphic idea of God. For Spinoza, God is not distinct from nature, but inseparable from it because he is an absolutely infinite substance. In other words, God exists autonomously as everything conceivable and there is nothing particular from Him. In this paper, we can agree with Spinoza's claim that God fundamentally exist and show how it fits into his arrangements of the *Ethics*. Next, we will explain the three contentions that Spinoza's accommodates God's presence.

Spinoza claims that God necessarily exists. However, what he means by *God* is really "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself;" attribute, "that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence;" mode, "the affections of substance;" and God, "an absolutely infinite being" (Spinoza, 2002, p.217). Here, he is truly asserting that God is a totally boundless substance: God has unending number of qualities and each attribute is endless in its own kind. In another sense, Spinoza is additionally discrediting the Judeo-Christian idea of God. This is the view where God is anthropomorphized and defined as a being that made a universe distinct from himself, by his own choice. Spinoza trusts that clutching such a perspective of God limits human nature and oppresses us to a life of passions and superstitions, because we would hope for God's rewards and fear for his punishments. Hence, his point in the *Ethics* was to set up an alternate conception of God

that could free us from interests and persuade us to act from reason instead of from superstition.

For Spinoza, God is not separate from nature. God is the only substance that exists, and no other thing exists which separated from it. Specifically, it assumes a significant part in exhibiting that just only one substance (God) exists. If there were another substance separated from God, at that point it would share no less than one attribute with God, who has all qualities. Yet additionally he claims that two substances can't have a similar quality, on the grounds that if two substances share a similar attribute, at that point they would be indistinct from each other. That implies that the second substance would be part of God, not distinct from it. As such, God exists essentially as a totally endless substance.

In the second contention, Spinoza expresses that if something exists, there must be a defence for its reality. Moreover if something does not exist, there must be a justification for why it does not exist. This justification comes either from the nature of the thing, or outside the nature of the thing. For example, a substance exists because its nature necessarily involves existence, whereas a square-circle does not exist because its nature involves a contradiction. In contrast, the existence or non-existence of a coin does not depend on its nature, but on the order of the physical universe. Thus, a thing necessarily exists if nothing from its own nature or outside its nature stops it from existing. If there is nothing that stops God from existing, then it must exist. Now suppose if there was such a thing that could stop God's existence. It would either come from God's own nature or outside it. If it were outside of God's nature, then it would be a separate substance that is completely dissimilar from God. This substance would have nothing in common with God and would not be able to interact with God or stop God from existing. If it came from God's nature then it would mean that God's nature involved a contradiction like the square-circle. But, according to Spinoza, it would be absurd for the nature of an absolutely infinite being to involve something negative or contradictory. Thus God necessarily exists, since nothing can stop God from existing.

The last contention is an a *posteriori* one, which relies upon the way that human beings exist. As indicated by Spinoza, existence is power: a thing has control in the event that it can exist, while a thing needs control in the event that it can't exist. Currently, if God does not exist while some limited things do exist essentially, at that point limited things are more intense than a completely boundless thing. This is strange because that would be claiming that human beings are more effective than God because we are able to exist but God cannot. So if something exists, it takes that a completely unbounded thing fundamentally exists. Obviously we exist, so God necessarily exists.

Now, we come to the concept of God in terms of to the Islamic philosophy of Ibn-Arabi. The first thing we should clearly understand about Islam is what the word 'Islam' itself means. The religion of Islam is not named after a person as in the case of Christianity which was named after Jesus Christ, Buddhism after Gotama Buddha. Nor was it named after a tribe like Judaism after the tribe of Judah and Hinduism after Hindus. Islam is the great monotheistic religion of the world; was founded by the Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of the sixth century A.D. Islam is the true religion of 'Allah' and it means submission to the will of God and obedience to His law, and also Islam means 'peace'. The God of Islam, Allah, is presented in the Holy Qur'an as an eternal, transcendent and almighty. He is the omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

There are generally the two important doctrines of Sufism, Wahadat- al- Wujud (the unity of existence) of Ibn- Arabi and Wahadat- al- Shahud (Unity of appearance) of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi known as Mijaddid Alfthani. In Ibn 'Arabi's Idea, there is no place for the established theory of creation, according to which God made the Universe out of nothing. Creation for Ibn 'Arabi does not imply that God as a prime reason brought a few things into existence. When God creates the creatures, He makes their entities apparent, bringing them from the state of immutability into existence in their material form. This is why, the existence of a thing which had no existence before its creation, or any type of creative operation which has come to an end is meaningless for Ibn 'Arabi. Instead, creative beings have 'pre-eternal' and 'post-eternal' essences that are manifested at every moment in

innumerable forms of beings. In this sense, the process of creation is a continuous movement and does not take place only once; it is dynamic, not static.

It is within this line of thought that Ibn 'Arabi takes up the theme of multiplication and proposes his doctrine of 'Oneness of Being' (wahdat al-wujud), the idea which many Sufis subsequently summed up in the epithet, "All is He". Central to the theory of 'Oneness of Being' is the idea that the ultimate reality of everything in the whole of existence is Divine. This is to say, all things in the entire universe is one inasmuch as it reflects God's oneness; God's creatures are merely reflections of his wujud (Being). In this sense, while God in its essence is unchanging, absolute, and transcendent, he is present in everything in the world:

all reality in the world is a sign that directs us toward a divine reality that is the starting point of its existence and the place of return when it comes to term (Michel Chodkiewicz, 1993, p.36).

In a similar vein, in his Treatise on Unity, Ibn 'Arabi writes: "His Prophet (God's Prophet) is He (God), and His sending is He, and His world is He. He sent Himself with Himself to Himself". (Nasr, 1969, p.107) As Alexander Knysh noted (Alexander, 1999, p.14), Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of Oneness of Being implies that God is "no longer the absolute otherworldly and impregnable entity of mainstream Muslim theologians. He rather becomes part and parcel of, and immanent to, His creation". For Ibn 'Arabi, many accounts of God presented by Muslim theologians failed to realize the unity that exists between God and creatures. He emphasized the mutual dependence of God and the world, focusing on the complete reciprocity between the two; this dependence, according to him, is continuous: "without the world of creation, God cannot be known as Creator; without living things, God cannot be recognized as the Living." (Nasr, 1969, p.116) In this sense, "God becomes the mirror in which the spiritual man contemplates his own reality and man in turn becomes the mirror in which God contemplates His Names and Qualities." (Nasr, 1969, p.116)

Thusly, as expressed, the principle of 'Oneness of Being' does not just claim that the world and the things in it are God, rather, states that the essence of everything found on the world

is nothing other than His. The quick conclusion of this thought is that everything in the universe is a sign or even locus of God and reflects Him in somehow, and accordingly God ought not to be restricted to any of existents in the universe. In spite of the fact that there are numerous objects in the world, there is single thing since everything is merely a reflection of the One. This is people who see variety, and not solidarity:

in accordance with their preparedness within themselves, the entities of thingnesses of the cosmos display properties within that which is Manifest within them as is given by their own realities...but there is nothing other than God (Moradi, 2014, p.186).

Conclusion: We can understand from above discussion that according to them, God is immanent and transcendental in the world. But, both Spinoza and Ramanuja say that God is only Substance. Spinoza also says that thought and extension is infinite attributes and parallel of each other. But according to Ramanuja, God is qualified (Sagun) by matter and souls. Matter and souls form his body and are inseparable from and souls are called attribute (prakara) of God. According to Ibn-Arabi, God and the world are identical. The world is not an attribute of God. According to them, God is all and all is God. Everything's in this world are identical with God and God is also identical with everything in this world. There are no separation between God and world. But Ramanuja is very few different from Spinoza and Ibn-al-Arabi. According to Ramanuja, there are three realities- (i) God, (ii) Souls, and (iii) matter. All there are equally real but the last two (Soul and Matter) are integral parts of Brahman. Apart from Brahman, they have no reality, Brahman, thus, is the only independent reality. They are substance in themselves, feet in relation to God, they become His attributes, we see that, according to Sankara, Brahman and God are not identical; they are different from each other. Brahman is upper and God is lower Brahman. Brahman is not creator of the world. Only God is the creator of the world. He is also called it maya. But Ramanuja does not make any distinction between Brahman and God. God is Brahman and Brahman is God. According to Spinoza, God is only real and his attributes and the worlds are unreal. They are dependent on God. In the same way Ibn-Arabi Wahadat-al-Wujud

means Allah (God) is only one and he is present in everything. All is God and God is all. God is imminent in His creative. There is not a single practice of the universe, which is separate from him.

Finally, we can say that the approaches of the religions to the concept of God are quite different. They hold views which are not only different but also totally irreconcilable to each other. The views of Hinduism that the God is the personal/impersonal being cannot be reconciled with the views of Islam which views God as omniscient, omnipotent, omniscient. Islam views God is the creator that is never-finishing 'everlasting' object; Where as in Hinduism, there are different branches that give different views which are themselves irreconcilable to one another. From the above discussion, we can say that the concept of God and world and of their relation are similar among Western (Spinoza), Indian (Ramanuja) and Muslim (Ibn- Arabi) philosophy or philosopher.

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