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Non-dualism: A Discussion in the Light of Vedānta and Sufism

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Abstract:

Non-dual means denial of two parts or aspects in an object and Non-dualism is that theory which refutes the duality and establishes the oneness or identity between them. In Vedānta, duality of 'Dualism' refers to two different aspects, i.e., individual self (*Jīva*) and Supreme Self, Brahman; but Non-dualism denies the separate existence of *Jīva* and Brahman and affirms the identity between them. Similarly, Sufism says about the union of man and God and declares the unity between them. Being identical with God the last goal of a mystic is to unite his carnal self with God. So, Sufism also refutes the duality. *Advaita* Vedānta affirms the absolute non-duality between *jīva* and Brahman. '*Pañca-Vedānta-Sampradāya*' also holds the non-duality between them. Even the *Dvaitavāda* of Madhva does not hold the duality in the sense in which the *Sāṃkhya* holds it. Similarly, Sufism says that man is essentially divine. He is the manifestation of God and is not basically different from Him. So, Sufis say that it is possible to attain God only through loving the men. Different Sufist philosophers have different views regarding the relation between man and God. There are some similarities between Vedāntic and Sufis view. The following paper is an attempt to discuss the similarities.)

Key Words: Non-dualism, Sufism, Jīva, Jagat, Brahman

Introduction: Dual means an object consisting of two parts or aspects. Dualism refers to that 'ism' which affirms the duality. Non-dual means denial of two parts or aspects in an object and Non-dualism is that theory which refutes the duality and establishes the oneness or identity between them. In Vedānta, duality of 'Dualism' refers to two different aspects, i.e., individual self (*Jīva*) and Supreme Self, Brahman; but Non-dualism denies the separate existence of *Jīva* and Brahman and affirms the identity between them. Similarly, Sufism (Mysticism of Islam) says about the union of man and God and declares the unity between them. Being identical with God the last goal of a mystic is to unite his carnal self with God. So, Sufism also refutes the duality. The following paper is an attempt to discuss the Non-dualism of Vedānta and Sufism.

Non-dualism in Vedānta: Non-dualism of Vedānta says that the limitative conditions of Brahman creates the false knowledge of duality and difference between the individual soul

and the Supreme soul, Brahman. Śaṅkarācārya formulated the doctrine of Non-duality between empirical self and Transcendental Self at numerous places in his commentaries. The brand name of his doctrine is *Advaitavāda*. He explained the apparent duality between them through the association of different upādhis. But the methods of interpretations of the Non-dual persuasion amongst Pre and Post- Śaṅkarite Advaitins are different.

Three different theories regarding the identity of the soul and the Absolute are described in ‘*Vākyānvaya Adhikaraṇ*’ in the *Brahman-sūtra*.¹ It is quoted in *Brahman-sūtra*, that ‘*pratijñāsiddheliṅgamāśmarathyaḥ*’.² It says that According to Āśmarathya Brahman and the individual soul (*Jīvas*), which are related as cause and effect respectively, are not different, yet different from each other. Just as sparks of fire are different from fire and yet not different from fire.

It is quoted in *Brahman-sūtra* that “*Utkramiṣyat evambhāvādityouḍulomiḥ*”³ i.e., “Āuḍulomi says that (the statement about the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Self occurs in the beginning) since this state of identity comes to the soul when it departs from the body”.⁴ Āuḍulomi admits two states of the Supreme Self- the soul under bondage and freedom. He holds that the individual soul is only a state of the Supreme Self. Therefore, according to Āuḍulomi, the relation between the Supreme Self and individual soul is both different and non-different.

The third view is expressed in *Brahman-sūtra* that “*avasthetiriti Kāśakṛtsna*”⁵, i.e., ‘Kāśakṛtsna thinks (the statement about the identity in the beginning of the text is in order) because of the existence of the Supreme Self as the individual soul’⁶. Kāśakṛtsna holds that the Supreme Self Himself appears as the individual soul and He is identical with the individual soul also in the state of transmigration. They are absolutely non-different from the Supreme Self. The apparent difference is due to the limiting adjuncts (upādhis). Upādhis are products of ignorance and consequently unreal from the absolute point of view. Of these three schools of Vedānta delineated in the last three sūtras, the view of Kāśakṛtsna is justified by the Vedānta texts. Only Kāśakṛtsna’s view is in accord with the Upaniṣads. His theory agrees with the Vedic instruction as stated in such texts as “That thou art”⁷ and from the stand point of the non-difference.

Vedānta philosophy has two main Schools: Monistic (*Advaita*) Vedānta and Monotheistic Vedānta. Monotheistic School has five main *Vaiṣṇava* Schools: *Rāmānuja*, *Nimbārka*, *Madhya*, *Vallabha*, *Śrī Caitanya*. Their system is known respectively as *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, *Dvaitādvaita*, *Dvaita*, *Śuddhādvaita*, *Acintyābheda*. Advaita Guru Śaṅkarācārya conveys the essence of the Advaita Vedānta Śaṅkarācārya said:

“*Ślokārdhena pravakṣyāmi yaduktani granthakotibhiḥ*
Brahma satya jagannmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ.”

Ācārya has expressed the truth through the half of the verse, while billions of books are busy to prove it. That truth is: ‘Brahman alone is real, the universe is unreal and the individual soul (*jīva*) is no other than the Universal soul’⁸-Advaita Vedānta says that the

universe and the *jīva* are dissolved in Brahman and that's why they accept that only Brahman is true. Brahman is the efficient and material cause of the *jagat*. The *jagat-prapañca* is dissolved in its own cause and only Brahman remains. Even, when *jīva* becomes free from *Māyā*, he knows himself as Brahman. So, the Brahman alone is Real.

The School of Rāmānuja has admitted that Brahman is 'One only without a second'⁹ as admitted unanimously by all the Vedāntic schools. Hence, the school has to be admitted that Brahman is identical with *Jīva-Jagat* in *Svarūpa*. Yet, Brahman is different from *Jīva-Jagat* in *Guṇas* or attributes-powers-forms. Even the liberated soul is different from Brahman, because he does not have the power of creation, sustenance and destruction and is atomic in size. In exactly the same manner, *Jagat* is different from Brahman because of its impurity and imperfection but identical with Him in *Svarūpa*. Therefore, it can be said that Brahman is identical with *Jīva* and *jagat* in *Svarūpa* but different in *Guṇa*.

According to Nimbārka, the relation of the individual soul and Brahman is as between a cause and its effect, a substance and its attributes, a whole and its parts, a substratum of powers and its powers. But in our ordinary life, there is a relation of difference and non-difference between the cause and its effect. For example: the pot, dishes and the rest are all by nature non-different from their material cause, lump of clay, as they do not have their existence and activity apart from the lump of clay. But there is yet a mutual difference among the particular effects themselves. Moreover, the effects of clay (pot, dishes, and the rest) possess their own peculiar attributes (different names, shapes and so on) which the clay lacks. So, the relation between the cause and its effects is neither pure non-difference nor pure difference but natural difference and non-difference. Likewise, the relation between the individual soul and Brahman is natural difference and non-difference (*svābhāvika-bhedābheda*).

Madhvācārya says that the individual souls or *Jīvas* are absolutely, essentially and eternally different from *Īśvara* under all circumstances, at all times, in all places whatsoever. This difference is real and it remains even in liberation. He says:

*“Pañcabhedā Ime Nityāḥ sarvāvasthāsu sarvaśaḥ.
Muktānām ca na Hīyante Tāratamyam ca sarvadā”*¹⁰
*“Satyā viṣṇorguṇāḥ sarve satyā Jīveśayorbhidā
Satyo mitho Jīvabhedaḥ satyam ca Jagadṛśam”*¹¹

The cause of the difference between them is that *Īśvara* or Brahman is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent; while the individual soul or *Jīva* is little knowing or ignorant, little powerful or feeble; infinitely small or atomic in size. Moreover, *Īśvara* or Brahman possesses the supreme powers of Creation, Sustenance and Destruction of the Universe of *Jīva-jagat*, while the individual souls or *Jīvas* do not have these powers. For all these reasons, the individual soul is absolutely and eternally different from Brahman or *Īśvara* during bondage as well as Liberation, and always *Īśvara*'s servant and dependent.

According to Vallabha, Brahman is the Cause and whole and *Jīva* is the effects and parts.¹² The *Jīvas*, being effect and parts of Brahman, is not different from their cause, Brahman but they are identical with Him. Because, Brahman Himself has appeared as *Jīva-Jagat* and what is known as an effect or a part, *Jīva-Jagat* is not different from the cause or the whole which is Brahman. So, the relation between Brahman and *Jīvas* is to be understood as identity (*Tādātma*). This identity is not actual identity but identity which involves the notion of identity in difference, in that case what appears as separate from the cause is only a different states and forms of the appearance of the cause. According to Vallabha, Brahman is unchanging or *avikṛta*. Even in the Brahman's manifestation as the *Jīva-Jagat* there is no modification in the essence (or *svarupa*) of Brahman.

According to Vallabha, *Jīva* is absolutely identical with Brahman, yet it is different from Him in many important respects: (i) Brahman is Vibhu or All-pervasive; but *Jīva* is *Aṇu* or atomic in size, (ii) Brahman has the powers of Creation, Sustainance and Dissolution, but *Jīva* does not have these powers entirely, (iii) Brahman is the Controller but the *Jīva* is the controlled, (iv) The *Jīva* is the worshipper but Brahman is the object to be worshipped, (v) Brahman is Sat-Cit-Ānanda or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss in His nature or *svarūpa* but the *Jīva* is only Sat-Cit or Existence-Consciousness in its nature.

According to Śrī Caitanya the relation between Brahman and *Jīva* is *Bhedābheda-prakāśa*. It means to say that in the same aspect, there cannot be both difference and non-difference of the same objects. But there can be non-difference in some particular aspects and difference in other particular aspects (of the same objects). Such difference is not necessarily contradicted with the non-difference.¹³ Jivagoswāmī, a follower of the school of 'Acintya-bhedābheda', says, in his 'Sarva-Samvādīnī', that the absolute difference in *Jīva* and Brahman is impossible, in the same way non-difference is also impossible. Because, there are limitless faults in difference like the non-difference. We have to accept 'the incomprehensible difference and non-difference' ('*Acintyabhedābhedavāda*')¹⁴

Non-dualism in Sufism: Mysticism is a common aspect of all religions which tells to surrender one's finite self to the Absolute Being by devotion to faith and Love. The last goal of a mystic is to unite his carnal self with God. Only after a long period of purification and mortification of his finite self he will be able to reach the Last goal of all mystical quest. 'Sufism' is the Islamic mysticism. The Arabic word of it is '*Taṣawwuf*'.

The basic tenet of the *Ṣūfīs* is that the human beings are the production of God's Essence and that nothing exists absolutely except Him. Man is essentially divine. Though man is regarded as a separate being but each of them is a miniature of God and in paradise he will be reunited with Him from whom he came and that is the summum-bonum of *Ṣūfī* life. The arguments of Sufism for the union with God are as follows:

Muslims believe that *Adam* is the first human being created by God. The holy Quran reveals the idea that *Adam* is the creation of God, as thus:

“...to what I created with my own hands”¹⁵

God has created *Adam* out of clay or dust. The holy Quran says in this regard:

“I am about to create a human being out of clay”.¹⁶

“You created him from clay”.¹⁷

“He created him from dust.”¹⁸

The *Hadīth* (*Bukhārī and Muslim*) also says about the creation of *Adam*, as thus:

“God created *Adam* in His own form”¹⁹ But here the term ‘form’ does not mean ‘external form’ or only the arrangement of different parts of the body, rather it means ‘internal form’, that can be applicable only to the spiritual side. So, the import of the statement ‘God created *Adam* in His own form’ is ‘God created *Adam* in His own spiritual and rational form, not corporeal or material form’. So, Abu Huraira comments:

‘*Adam* was created in His form and Essence’²⁰

After creating *Adam*, God breathed His spirit into him and commanded the angels to prostrate before him. Quran says in this regard:

“And when I have formed him fully and breathed My spirit into him, prostrate yourself before him.”²¹

After commanding the angels to prostrate before him, he was given a place in Paradise. The spouse of *Adam*, commonly referred to as *Hawa* or *Eve*, was created to accompany him as his life partner. The details of the creation of *Eve* is not mentioned in Quran. However, it is referred that *Eve* was created from *Adam*. The holy Quran says:

“He created its mate from it.”²²

The *Hadīth* further reveals that *Eve* was created from left rib of *Adam* which was taken while he was asleep and unaware.²³ After creation of *Eve*, the couple was instructed to live together in heaven and they were free to eat and enjoy everything in heaven with the exception of one particular tree. Though, it is not mentioned in the holy Quran what kind of tree it was. Quran says:

“O *Adam*! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat freely from it anywhere you may wish. Yet do not approach this tree lest you become wrongdoers.”²⁴

But, at Satan’s repeated provocations, they forgot about God’s warning about that tree. One day, they tasted the tree’s fruit. Consequently, they were expelled from the Paradise and sent to the earth. Quran says:

“He said, ‘Go down from here as enemies to each other. For a while, there is an abode for you and a provision on earth’”²⁵

So, *Adam* and *Eve* are the first couple of the earth and from them God spread countless people throughout the earth. Quran says:

“...from the two of them spread countless men and women (throughout the earth).”²⁶

So, the very first couple is the First Parents of all the people of the earth. We, the people are the children of *Adam* and God has also addresses us as ‘the children of *Adam*’²⁷. Besides, the Quran says: “It was He who created you from a single soul...”²⁸ Again, the Quran says regarding the spirit: “Say, ‘The Spirit is at my Lord’s command,...’”²⁹

Therefore, it can be said that the ancestral origin of us, the children of Adam, is from Adam. Rather, it can be said that we are from God since, God had breathed His spirit into our First Father. So, basically, men are not different from God. Although, different Sufists have viewed different opinions regarding the nature of the relation between man and God.

There are four major Ṣūfī theories regarding the relation of God and man:

(a) God and the men are absolutely distinct in essence and attributes. A man can never become identical with God or even similar to Him either in essence or in attributes. The relation of them is just like the relation of a Master and his servant. The orthodox Sufis, like Kalabadhi, Hujwiri and so on are the supporters of this view. According to them the union with God means (i) absolute annihilation of worldly desires and giving up all independent will and selfish desire (*Fanā*); (ii) devotion to God and to be submissive servant of Him.

(b) God and the men are absolutely identical in essence and attributes, and *Jīva-jagat* is real. Pantheistic Ṣūfīs like, ‘Abdu’ l-Karīm ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jīlī, are the supporters of this theory. According to them man is identical with God and he is the combination of God’s attributes.

(c) God and the men are absolutely identical in essence and attributes, but *Jīva-jagat* is non-real, illusive. According to them man is not different from God, a reflection of God. Human body and soul are like a mirror and a torch respectively, and both these reflect the same light of God. The same God is reflected through the plurality of mankind, just as the same sun radiates through many windows. Hence, ‘I’, ‘you’, and ‘He’ are all one in Reality. The distinction of God and man, and the distinctions among ‘I’, ‘you’, and ‘He’ are illusive. So, Shabistary says:

“‘I’, ‘we’, ‘thou’ and ‘he’ are all one thing.
For in unity there is no distinction of person.”³⁰

(d) God and the man are identical in qualities but distinct in essence. According to Jālāluddīn Rūmī when a man is re-united with God, he only assumes the qualities of Him, not the essence. The man becomes one with God in attributes but not in essence. . The state of re-union is accurately illustrated by Jālāluddīn Rūmī as follows:

“When my ego has passed, He only remained, I shall (remain) at the feet of his horse
like dust”³¹

Conclusion: From the short analysis of Non-dualism of Vedānta and Sufism it is seen that there are some similarities between these two theories in some respects. The first Sufi theory has some similarities with *dvaitavāda* of Madhvācārya. Both of the theories hold that the men are completely different from God either in *svarūpa* (essence) or in *guṇas* (qualities). Identity between them is absolutely impossible, because, these two things are eternally and essentially very different from one another. The second theory of Sufism resemblances with the *Śuddhādvaita-vāda* of Vallabha. According to both of the theories, being the manifestation of God, man is always non-different from Him; yet not illusive; he is as real as God. There are some similarities between the third theory of Sufism and the *Advaitavāda* of Śaṅkarācārya. Both theories hold that the difference between man and God is illusory. All men are the reflections of God. All men are mutually identical; as well as

identical with Brahman, just as the *ghatākāśa* (space inside a pot) is identical with another *ghatākāśa*, as well as identical with *mahākāśa* (the uniform existence of space). God is the only Truth, the men and the universe, is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between man and God. The fourth theory of Śūfism has similarities, in some respects, with the theory of Rāmānuja. Both theories hold that all men are identical with one another and with God in their qualities or *guṇas*, but not in essence or *svārūpa*. In Rūmī's view, it is true that man is essentially different from God, but not completely different, because, then, union of them and the identity in qualities will not be possible. Just like an organ is essentially different from the whole organism, yet not completely different. It has no separate qualities or essence, but abides through the qualities and existence of the whole organism. Again, Rāmānuja says, it is true that the *Jīvas* are identical with God in essence or *svārūpa*, yet not completely identical, because, then, the existence of the *Jīvas* will not be possible. Therefore, the meaning of Rūmī's 'difference in *svārūpa*' is the same of Rāmānuja's 'non-difference in *svārūpa*'. The *Jīvas* are both identical and different, i.e., identity-in-difference from God in their essence.

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