

Concept of Difference According to the Dvaita School of Indian Philosophy

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Abstract

The Dvaita school of Indian Philosophy was formulated by Madhvācārya also called as Ānandatīrtha of circa thirteenth century CE. It is a realistic school professing the concept of dualism. Considered as a tough opponent to the popular monistic school of Indian Philosophy—Advaita Vedānta—the school develops on the concept of difference. In other words, difference can be said to be the pivotal principle of this school and it maintains the concept of difference even in the state of liberation in which the selves are free from the cycle of transmigration consisting of births and deaths. This clearly distinguishes this school from the other schools of Indian Philosophy wherein difference ceases to exist once the self becomes liberated. This paper explores the concept of difference as admitted by Dvaita Vedānta in a critical perspective.

Keywords: Philosophy, Indian, Dvaita, Difference

1. Introduction

The Dvaita school of Indian Philosophy was formulated by Madhvācārya (Madhva in short) also called as Ānandatīrtha of circa thirteenth century CE. He hailed from the present Karnataka State of South India. Madhva has authored thirty-seven works. Jayatīrtha has written extensive commentaries on the works of Madhva. Besides Madhva and Jayatīrtha, Vyāsātīrtha is also an important preceptor of this school (R. Saraswati, unpublished observation).

1.2. The Concept of Difference

The philosophy of Madhva centres around the three concepts of god, self and the world. Being a theistic system, Dvaita Vedānta identifies god with Viṣṇu the preserver of the Universe according to Hinduism. The self and the world are real entities like god, but they are distinct and dependent on him. In other words, god is the only independent entity and the other two are dependent entities.

The world is real and is consisted of five-fold differences. These differences are difference between the god and self, difference between world and god, difference between self and world, differences among various selves and differences among the various objects of the world (Pandurangi: 1991).

When an object is perceived, it is perceived as different from others. Difference is the essential nature of an object. Madhva extends this theory of difference not only to the objects of

the world but also to the state of liberation(mokṣa)as well. Liberation according to Madhva is reaching the abode of Lord Viṣṇu, wherein the self being free from the cycles of births and deaths, experiences bliss. It is god who subjects the selves to bondage and it is god who chooses the aspirants fit for liberation and exonerates them. While the concept of experiencing bliss in liberation is accepted by other schools of Indian Philosophy such as the Advaita of Śaṅkara, what distinguishes Madhva is the theory of gradation of bliss even in the state of liberation.

Every individual is different, and the effort put forth towards achieving liberation is also different. In the words of B.N.K. Sharma (Sharma: 1962), "Since Mokṣa is only the discovery and enjoyment of one's own selfhood, in its pristine purity and bliss, there is no possibility of exchanging one's experience of bliss with another's, or of its transference to another, whether, in wholly or in part." In the same light, Madhva also proposes the theory of gradation among selves. He classifies selves into three types: those who deserved to be liberated, those who are ever transmigrating and those who are subjected to eternal damnation.

2. Conclusion

Every individual in this world is different and every object is different. It is this underlying concept of difference that brings in variety into the world of experience. Individuals

strive to maintain their individuality and their preferences. In this light, Madhva's concept of difference is pragmatic and is realistic. At the same time, his adherence to the notion of difference as the foundation of his system leads him to accept two concepts which are generally not accepted by other schools of Indian Philosophy: gradation of selves in the state of bondage and gradation of bliss in the state of liberation. While most of the systems do accept selves that are superior to normal human beings, the concept that some selves do not deserve to be liberated poses a question to a theistic system especially which centres so much on the compassion of god towards his devotee. When it is god who chooses an individual for liberation, god might also choose to exonerate a self which is subjected to eternal damnation and give an opportunity to improve and gradually attain liberation. We may in this context quote the popular saying: "Every saint had a past and every sinner has a future." In the same light

while the liberated self experiences lesser bliss than its other counterparts, is there an opportunity to work towards improvisation in the state of liberation? If so, the compassion of god might work in this case too and there is a possibility that difference will cease to exist in the state of liberation.

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