



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

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ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2022; 8(5): 180-183

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 13-07-2022

Accepted: 16-08-2022

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Brahmavāda: A solution to happiness

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Abstract

Apart from the epistemological knowledge, philosophy is also a way to lead an ideal life, thereby a gateway to happiness. Vallabhācārya's philosophy known as Śuddhādvaita Brahmavāda provides a practical solution for happiness by a change in the mindset. It presents a divine confluence of thought and devotion bathing in which one can feel the divine bliss. A sincere effort has been made to discover the path of happiness through Brahmavāda

Keyword: Vallabhācārya, śuddhādvaita brahmavāda, jagat, saṃsāra, sarvātmabhāva, śaraṇāgati, samarpaṇa

Introduction

All human endeavours are directed towards the attainment of happiness and relief from misery and sorrow. But true happiness cannot be attained only by accumulation of wealth. In fact, happiness depends more upon the thought process and the mental condition of an individual rather than the external factors. Thus, came into being a special field of study known as philosophy which directly deals with the thought process of humanity.

A systematic presentation of a view of philosophy was given the name darśana which literally means sight. In this context, it is maintained that these philosophical truth are directly experienced and known by the sages and savants who first promulgated them. These were not arrived at by an analysis of empirical experience as in the west. But they were the truth given to the sages when they went in search of them. "The word darśana has a more relevant connotation for philosophising. It means that one should not be merely content in logically understanding the truth about reality but should live in accordance with such convictions. Philosophy in ancient India was not only a logical appreciation of truth, but it was a way of life"^[1].

Indian philosophy named as darśana deals with the specific problem of complete and permanent relief from misery. According to Bhāratīya Darśana, the permanent relief from misery is only possible through the cessation of rebirth cycle, that is, through salvation or mokṣa. As long as a person gets a birth he is bound to undergo sorrow and misery. Thus, the ultimate aim of every individual, in Sanātana Dharma, should be to attain mokṣa.

But in today's world we have no takers for this concept. Today's world is materialistic. Each and every person wants to be happy in the present life. Thus, the question arises, does Bhāratīya Darśana provide a solution for relief from misery in the present life? With the changing times, people's mind set is also changing; from a broader perspective to narrower one. Sanātana Dharma has always followed the path of change as per the need. Darśana being an inevitable part of Sanātana Dharma, also addresses the needs of modern people through its insight full thoughts.

There are six schools of Indian philosophy. These are Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. Of these, Vedānta is the most acclaimed School of Indian philosophy. There are many sub schools of Vedānta right from Ādi Śaṅkarācārya to Vallabhācārya. Each of these ācārya has a theory of his own. Among them, let us study the Darśana of Vallabhācārya in the light of modern perspective

Before we start studying Vallabhācārya's Vedānta, we will have a bird's eye view of the Vedānta philosophy as a whole. As the name itself suggests, Vedānta Darśana is found in the end part of the Vedās known as Upaniśads. Apart from Upaniśads, we can find elaborate description of Vedānta in Bhagavad Gītā also.

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The main source of Vedānta Darśana is said to be Brahma Sūtras written by Veda Vyāsa. All the above three Śāstras are collectively called as prasthānatrayī forming the foundation for Upaniśads^[2]. There have been many ācāryas who have interpreted the above three prasthānatrayī grāthās according to their ideology and thus presented their own theories on Vedānta. Though each ācārya differs from the other in his views on Vedānta, all of them provide a divine path for attainment of mokṣa and moreover, path to live a spiritual and contented life.

Vallabhācārya

“Vallabhācārya, like all the famous ācāryas, happens to be the contribution of the South to this country. His ancestors, Yājñā Narāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, Gaṅgādhara Bhaṭṭa, were men of deep learning steeped in the Vedic lore and Hindu scriptures. They had performed one hundred Soma-yāgas. This family was one of the Telugu Brahmins of South India living in Kākarvāḍa or Kukūṃbhakara, town on the southern Bank of the river Kṛṣṇa in the Andhra state of today. Vallabha was the second son of Lakṣmaṇa Bhaṭṭa and Yallammā gāru”^[2]. Tradition of Vallabha- sampradāya considers Viṣṇu Svāmī to be the founder of Śuddhādvaita School which was regenerated by Vallabha.

Vallabhācārya’s philosophy- Śuddhādvaita Brahmavāda:

Vallabhācārya philosophy is called as Śuddhādvaita which means pure monism. It is also called as Brahmavāda because it emphasizes on the concept of everything being Brahma. Advaita means acceptance of no other substance than Brahma. Vallabhācārya has named his philosophy as Śuddhādvaita because he accepts the Oneness of Brahma in its purest form. He negates the theory that Brahma depends upon other factors such as māyā for creation of the universe^[3].

According to Vallabha, the world that we are seeing, including animate and inanimate world, is nothing but a manifestation of the Ultimate Reality called Brahma. In this creation there exists nothing else than the Brahma. He Himself has taken various forms and various names, to play in his own manifestation called as jagat or universe⁴. Vallabhācārya accepts Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord. According to him all the living beings are none else than the form of Kṛṣṇa himself. Even the non living substance is the material form of the Lord.

Brahma is adorned with three qualities of existence, knowledge and bliss, also known as sat, cit and ānanda. “Inanimate world is also 'filled with Brahma'(brahmātmaka). In it, the two qualities of Brahma- knowledge and bliss are obscured, and what remains is Śuddhā-sattā or pure existence. Creation and destruction of the world are only the manifestation and non manifestation of the Supreme who puts on these forms. Brahma becomes a product and is apprehended in the state of creation, while in destruction the world returns to its original form, and ceases to be an object of perception. The world, therefore, is as eternal and real as Brahma Himself and its creation and destruction are due to the power (śakti) of Brahma. The world cannot be regarded as an illusory appearance; nor is it essentially different from Brahma. The relation of cause and effect is of absolute identity. The world in truth is Brahma. Brahma manifests himself of his own will as the individual souls and the world, without undergoing any change in his essential nature. He is the material as well as the efficient cause of the world”^[4].

According to Vallabhācārya, jīva or the individual soul is nothing but the Brahma himself. The only difference between

Jīva and Brahma is that the Jīva is smaller in size (aṇu) and it is devoid of the ānanda attribute of the Brahma (which makes it to fall into the darkness of ignorance). Each soul is Brahma in the same way as each spark is a fire. All the souls and the world appear from Brahma, as sparks appear from fire^[5]. Therefore, each individual or Jīva is nothing but Brahma.

As we have mentioned above, the world that we see around us, is also nothing but a manifestation of the Brahma Himself. As jīva is devoid of bliss or ānanda, jagat is devoid of ānanda and cit (conscience) both. It has only the ‘sat’ attribute of the Brahma.

Brahma, according to Vallabha, is Saṅga and Sākāra that is, having divine attribute and divine form. The One whom you can worship, love, meditate upon and serve. He doesn’t accept the theory of Śaṅkarācārya that the Brahma is only nirākāra and nirguṇa (formless and attributeless). Such a God is difficult to be worshiped. Vallabha’s Para Brahma is none other than Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is full of mercy and love towards his devotees.

The difference between jagat and saṃsāra

According to Vallabhācārya, jagat, the world, is different from the saṃsāra, which is caused due to ignorance. Jagat is the creation that we see around us. An individual creates his own world of ignorance around itself, by his ahaṃtā (ego) and mamatā (attachment). This self created world is called as saṃsāra. This saṃsāra is illusory. But the Jagat is real^[7].

Vallabhācārya’s teachings

Vallabhācārya preaches his disciples to completely surrender before the Almighty Kṛṣṇa. One is supposed to offer all his belongings to the God which is called as samarpaṇa. This samarpaṇa means giving back to the Lord what we have received from him. You have to return anything which you consider as yours, including your own self. You surrender him your house, wealth, wife, children, your body and even your soul. Here a devotee accepts the mastery of the God and believes himself to be his servant. He has no entity of his own other than being the devotee of the God. At the same time, he doesn’t own anything. Everything that he has belongs to the God. A devotee devotes his life for the service of the god. Whatever he eats, whatever he wears is first offered to the God and then taken as a blessing or prasāda of the God. This service towards the God is not merely a ritual, but it is out of pure love for the God. Devotion or bhakti, according to Vallabha, is pure, selfless and highest love for the God and at the same time a complete knowledge of the magnificence of the Supreme^[8]. Such a service towards the God would make the heart of a devotee full of love and devoid of hatred. “For Vallabha, such a devotion or bhakti is more than mokṣa”^[9].

Cause of misery in today’s world

What is the basic cause of misery? If we analyze deeply, we come to know that, one becomes unhappy only on these conditions-(i) someone hurts you either through words or through actions, (ii) you are not able to acquire what you long for, (iii) you lose any of your possessions, (iv) you hate someone due to jealousy or any reason. Therefore we can say that sorrow is a result of either ego or attachment. If you are able to overcome this ego and attachment, you are sure to be happy.

Vallabhācārya’s solutions to these problems

The path of devotion preached by Vallabhācārya helps one overcome all these worldly miseries without any difficulty. A

deep study into the philosophy of Vallabhācārya, known as Brahmavāda, also prepares one with the mindset that will help to rise about the level of miseries.

According to Vallabhācārya, the whole world is none other than God himself. Leave alone inanimate things, each individual, each living being is nothing but a God in itself. Therefore, if you hate anyone, you hate the God. And if you are hurt by someone, it is none other than the God, who's trying to mend you. This vision of seeing God in everyone is called as Sarvātmabhāva by Vallabha. This Sarvātmabhāva is better said than realized. It is not so easy to develop this kind of feeling called Sarvātmabhāva, where in you actually start believing that each person is a God. It can only be developed through true, pure (selfless) and immense love for the God¹⁰. You love God to the extent that you see only Him everywhere. This realization is not a mental exercise but in fact a natural phenomenon born out of a heart full of love. In fact, this Sarvātmabhāva itself is mokṣa according to Vallabha. The relief from the world miseries is only a byproduct of it. The one who attains Sarvātmabhāva sees none other than God anywhere. For him everyone including himself is a form of God. What else is Brahma Jñāna? Vallabha makes one attain Brahma Jñāna through the nectar of love. Thus, following the path of Vallabha, one can attain mokṣa as well as complete relief from the worldly miseries. But this kind of immense love which leads to Sarvātmabhāva cannot be developed so easily by everyone. Vallabhācārya, therefore, lays down a path of devotion, following which one can gradually proceed towards the Sarvātmabhāva.

Vallabhācārya orders his followers to follow the path of bhakti through śaraṅgati and samarpaṇa. Śaraṅgati is complete surrender to the God. It's a kind of mental state where in a devotee firmly believes in the will of the God for his welfare. This is true wisdom¹¹. For him none is more important than the God. Samarpaṇa is mental acceptance of the fact that whatever we possess, material, inanimate or animate, is provided to us by the God and we return him what he has given us. But if you return, your wealth, house, wife, children, body and soul, how would you use them again? Here the offering it is not physical but mental. The devotee believes that whatever he thinks as his own, is now, not his property, but the property of God. He can use this property as a prasāda or blessing of the God. Just like a servant would live upon by whatever is given by his master, a devotee would live in the house considering it to be of the God, he would use his wealth but with the permission of the God, even his body belongs to the God. He himself is none other than the servant of the God. Such a mental condition helps the follower rise above all the agonies. As stated above, misery or sorrow is not lack of materialistic needs but it is a mental condition which creates pain due to attachment. You never feel sorrow if your neighbor's house is burning, but you will break down if it's your house. The feeling of possession leads to attachment which gives rise to miseries. When a devotee disowns everything, even if he loses it, he doesn't feel the pain. But that's irrational. How would you survive with the loss? Where would you live? Here comes in the concept of śaraṅgati. The devotee has strong belief in his God. The God will take care of him. This mental condition makes one totally free from sorrow and tension

Conclusion

To sum up, when a person gets relieved from attachment towards materialistic possessions or relations and receives a divine vision of seeing God in every person (called

sarvātmabhāva), there remains no reason for his suffering from misery, sorrow for tension. A person need not be a Vallabhācārya follower for getting this vision. Each one of us can imbibe this in our life. We should mentally accept the fact that whatever we possess does not belong to us but it belongs to the God. If someone robs us, it is the God's will to give the thief the object he has stolen. It belongs to God. He can give it to me or to the thief. At the same time we would not have any grudge against the thief too, as he is also a form of the God. This is a very small example. Such a divine mentality would relieve us from all the pains in life.

But it is not easy to develop such a mentality. As said earlier, it can be developed through true love towards the God. A constant practice to develop the said mentality, through love towards the God, is required for the follower to stabilize it. Vallabhācārya says one cannot achieve anything without the grace of the God. Even if you want to achieve God it can only be possible through his will. Thus, surrendering to the God completely and accepting his will is the final solution. "Vallabhācārya quotes the mantra of Kāthopaniṣada (2/23) to prove his point:

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनुंस्वाम् ॥
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