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RĀMĀNUJA'S VISIṢṬĀDVAITA AND HEGEL'S ABSOLUTE IDEALISM - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Shakuntala Gawde*

I. Preface:

Eastern and Western civilizations are different but they have tackled almost same problems of philosophy and in solving them their method and assumptions are strikingly similar. Rāmānuja and Hegel meet at many points regarding their metaphysical and ontological standpoints.

Rāmānuja (1017-1137 CE) is known as theologian and exponent of *Viṣiṣṭādvaita* philosophy. Rāmānuja tried to synthesize religion with philosophy. His main task was to combine the *pañcarātra* theism with the Upanisadic Absolutism. Initially, Rāmānuja was a student of *Kevalādvaita* system of *Vedānta*. Rāmānuja did not agree with the interpretations of certain Vedantic passages. He revolted against his preceptor Yādava Prakāśa about dry intellectual teachings which had no feeling or emotion for the deity. Rāmānuja did serious attempt to synthesize religion and philosophy by harmonizing religious feelings and logical thinking.

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 -1831 CE) was a great German philosopher who belonged to the modern era of philosophy. He structured European philosophy in a novel manner with integrated and constructive approach. He gave altogether a new turn to 'German Idealism' with his theory of 'Absolute Idealism'. He revolted against 'Abstract Idealism' constructed by his predecessors especially Plato and Kant.

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This paper aims to analyze the philosophical standpoints of both the philosophers and then to compare and contrast their ideologies. Structural similarities as well as differences in logical methods adopted by these philosophers to reach their standpoints will be worth seeing in comparison with each other.

This Paper undertakes comparative study of systems of Rāmānuja and Hegel with purely philosophical outlook. The objective is to analyze their views critically in comparison with each other and to cite not only similarities but differences as well.

II. Philosophical problem:

Philosophical problem faced by Rāmānuja and Hegel was that of 'abstract' philosophy put forth by their predecessors. Rāmānuja's main attack was on Śaṅkara's *Kevalādvaita* system of philosophy. He vehemently criticized the concept of *Nirguṇa Brahman* and *māyā*. Śaṅkara advocated the doctrine of identity of *Brahman* with *Jīva. Brahman* according to Śaṅkara was transcendental (*pārmārthika*) reality and it has to be understood in negative terms-*neti, neti*. Śaṅkara has solved the problem of illusory world with the doctrine of *māyā* establishing *Vivartavāda*. *Jagat* or world is nothing but the *vivarta* on *Brahman* and it is the product of *māyā*. Rāmānuja did not accept the standpoint of Śaṅkara that material world is illusory.

It was thought that Śaṅkara's Absolute *Brahman* is only reachable for the highly intellectuals and not to common people. Rāmānuja personified the concept of *Brahman* as *Nārāyaṇa* and made it approachable to common man with the means like *bhakti, prapatti*. Therefore, nice blend of philosophy and religion, reason and faith is seen in his thoughts. Thus, the relation between *Jīva, Jagat* and *Brahman* is also thought in different manner by Rāmānuja.

Quite similar situation was faced by Hegel in the form of Plato's 'Idealism'. Plato (c. 348/347 BCE) is known as the founder of Western Idealism. He propounded the 'theory of Ideas or Forms'. 'Idea' is the 'concept' or 'universal' which is eternal, real opposed to the sensible objects existing in this world.

The realm of Ideas is true and ultimately real for Plato. Platonic idea is not in any way a simple mental entity, since it is a being, that being that is absolutely real, the really real.¹ Plato propounded the concept of 'Absolute Good' which stands at the apex and regulates all the ideas. It is equated with the 'Idea of God' which is the Highest Reality and is the cause of truth and knowledge.² Plato admits that there is one Absolute God who is righteous, who moves all things in the universe.³ Objects of the empirical world are poor copies of those ideas existing in transcendental world. Plato admits ontological dualism in the form of two worlds, one having particular objects i.e. world of sensible object and the other the world of ideas i.e. transcendental world.

Hegel's main objection was on empty and abstract ideas of Plato and the ontological dualism by which 'particular' and 'universal' are cut off each other and they exist in totally different realms altogether. The world of sensible objects is considered to be false since it is ever changing and becoming whereas the transcendental world, the world of Ideas is real and eternal. Hegel was not ready to accept the falseness of the material world like that of Rāmānuja.

Aristotle's Realism (384 - 322 BCE) was in the favour of Hegel. In fact, Hegel is very much indebted to Aristotle. Aristotle criticized Plato's theory of ideas and especially the dualism of sense and reason, particular and universal. He rejected the unreality of sensible objects. On the contrary, he stressed the realism of the dynamic world which has its own teleology to move on. Ideas cannot remain beyond the particular objects and objects cannot exist without universals. So objects having universal or matter inherited with form is real. 'Formless matter' and 'matterless form' cannot exist without one exception e.g. God (*Actus Purus*) who is 'Form without matter.' Aristotle supports the view of realism where the reality of visual world is admitted and the world beyond sensory perception is rejected.

1 Reale, G. (1990) *A History of Ancient Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p. 47

2 *Republic* VI. 509

3 *Laws* X. 896, 898a

According to Hegel, 'actual is real' and 'actual is concrete.'⁴ In the Preface of *Philosophy of Right*, are found two propositions- 'What is reasonable is actual', and 'what is actual is reasonable'. Meaning of the word 'actual' is potential and not the thing which is static. Whatever is becoming, changing, having potentiality of something is rational in the sense that it is directed by some teleology. It means that reality is realized in and through the world in concrete manner. This view of Hegel is based on 'Realism' and 'teleology' of Aristotle and contrary to the view of Plato and Śāṅkara that the world of becoming is illusion.

Kant's Agnosticism (1724 - 1804 CE) was again the point of objection for Hegel. Kant's philosophical standpoint is known as 'Transcendental Idealism'. In Kant's view the structure of mind through which we formulate our experiences about the exterior world is 'transcendental' because they are the basis of experience and they are ideal because they are in the mind. The connotation of the word 'transcendental' is altogether different. The word 'transcendental' is not to suggest 'beyond' but it suggests 'before experience'.

His *Critique of Pure Reason* ends therefore in Agnosticism. He became skeptic about the knowledge concerning metaphysical entities called the world, soul and God. Kant has not denied the reality of these things but he considered them as limits of our experiences. Like Śāṅkara and Plato, Kant accepted the dualism of *phenomenon* (the world as it appears or experienced) and *noumenon* (a thing in itself i.e. a real nature of the world). Kant's Transcendental Idealism leads towards Agnosticism because he has rejected the possibility of knowing *thing-in-itself* (*Ding an sich*).

Hegel rejected the Agnosticism presented by Kant. Hegel's Absolute Idea (*Die Absolute Idee*) is comprehensible as it manifests itself in each and everything in the world. Thus, Hegel accepting the challenge of his predecessors did this work of synthesizing of one sided and partial views into his philosophy.

4 Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences*, Part I (§143, 144), translated by William Wallace, Marxists Internet Archive, 2009 (1830), p.302

III.1. Rāmānuja's *Saguna Brahman*:

Concept of *Nirguṇa, Nirākāra Brahman* is totally disagreed by Rāmānuja. S. Radhakrishnan says while commenting on the *Nirguṇa Brahman* of Śaṅkara-

'The Absolute of Śaṅkara is rigid, motionless and totally lacking in initiative and influence cannot call forth our worship. Like the Taj Mahal, which is unconscious of the admiration it arouses, the Absolute remains indifferent to the fear and love its worshippers, and all those who regard the goal of religion as the goal of philosophy-to know God is to know the real- Śaṅkara's view seems to be a finished example of learned error.'⁵

Śaṅkara has elucidated the concept of Highest (*para*) and lower (*apara*) *Brahman*. Ultimately he regards the Highest reality as *Nirguṇa Brahman*. Rāmānuja admits only one *Brahman* i.e. *Saguna*, the *Viṣṇu* or *Nārāyaṇa*. He is possessed of all auspicious qualities and devoid of all malicious attributes.⁶ Qualities like knowledge, power, strength, overlordship, prowess, lustor are denoted by the word *Bhagavat* as said in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.⁷ The word *Nirguṇa* is interpreted by Rāmānuja with positive and theistic approach. He says this word is used in *Upaniṣads* for the sake of dismissing all negative qualities. He has argued to prove that there cannot be mere assertion of the existence of *Brahman* devoid of qualities.

Rāmānuja's *Saguna Brahman* is worshipped through *bhakti, prapatti* and *śaraṇāgati*. He equates *bhakti* with *dhṛvānusmṛti* which leads towards liberation. He has given importance to 'grace of God' having resorted to the Upanishadic

5 Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999 p. 659

6 *Śribhāṣya* I.1.1

ब्रह्मशब्देन स्वभावतो निरस्तनिखिलदोषोऽनवधिकातिशयासंख्येयकल्याणगुणगणः पुरुषोत्तमोऽभिधीयते ।

7 *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, VI.5.79

ज्ञानशक्तिबलैश्वर्यवीर्यतेजांस्यशेषतः ।

भगवत्शब्दवाच्यानि विना हेयैर्गुणादिभिः ॥

references.⁸ Therefore R. D. Karamarkar has rightly said that- 'Rāmānuja, however, deserves full credit for making his doctrine popular and easily comprehensible to the people at large; steeped in the teachings of *Bhagavadgīta* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, as he was, he surely brings philosophy from heaven to earth.'⁹ Thus, Rāmānuja is credited for giving the practical approach towards ultimate reality.

III.2. Hegel's 'Absolute Idea' (*Die Absolute Idee*):

Ultimate Reality according to Hegel is 'Absolute Idea'. It manifests itself in each and everything existing in the world unlike Plato and Aristotle's 'Absolute Good' or 'Actus Purus' which stands at the apex of the pyramid and just regulates all ideas coming under It.

The Absolute Idea, which is the final product, is the result of the mutual concretization of all the abstract notions, the objectification of each one on every other.¹⁰ According to Robert Solomon, 'Absolute is complete, self-contained and all-encompassing. The Absolute is the unified, comprehensible whole-in plain terms, knowable reality. When Hegel talks about 'knowing the Absolute' he means, knowing reality.'¹¹

The Absolute is equated with God, the Highest manifestations of this principle of reason. Hegel calls this as Idea (*die Idee*). As J. Hibben has pointed out- 'The Idea, the Absolute, God are to be regarded as strictly synonymous

8 *Kāthopanīṣad* I.2.23

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

9 Karamarkar R. D. *Shribhashya of Ramanuja*, translated in English, University of Poona, Poona, 1989, p. xxxiii

10 Hegel, G.W.F. *op. cit.* p. 46

11 Solomon, Robert C. *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983, p. 174

terms used by Hegel interchangeably, and with no shade of distinction in their meaning.'¹²

Hegel is seen as offering a metaphysico-religious view of God *qua* 'Absolute Spirit', as the ultimate reality that we can come to know through pure thought process alone. In short, Hegel's philosophy is treated as exemplifying the type of pre-critical or 'dogmatic' metaphysics against which Kant has reacted in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and as a return to a more religiously driven conception of philosophy to which Kant had been opposed.¹³

Hegel tried to explain philosophy in its totality. In the opinion of Hegel, every science focuses on the part of *Geist* (spirit). For Hegel, 'part' is not real but appearance. When part is understood in connection with its whole then it is the knowledge of reality. Therefore, Hegel's Philosophy of *Geist* (spirit) manifests in three ways-the philosophy of Subjective Spirit, Objective Spirit and Absolute Spirit. Subjective spirit manifests itself into philosophy, psychology; Objective Spirit into Law and politics and Absolute Spirit into religion and philosophy. Hegel has tried to give all inclusive philosophy. Hegel's concept of Absolute Idea becomes clear when his dialectic method is carefully studied. It gives us Hegelian method of moving from abstract to concrete.

III. Standpoint of 'Monism' and 'Realism':

Rāmānuja and Hegel solved philosophical problem with the standpoint of monism. While doing so, they haven't negated the reality of world but accepted each and everything as real.

IV.1. Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita*:

Viśiṣṭādvaita means *Brahman* is qualified by *cit* (soul) and *acit* (matter). Rāmānuja vehemently criticized Śāṅkara's concept of *Nirguṇa Brahman*.

12 Hibben J. G. *Hegel's Logic: An Essay in Interpretation*, Batoche Books Limited, Kitchener, 2000, pp. 16-17

13 Redding, Paul, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Summer 2012 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/hegel/>>

According to him, *Brahman* cannot be Absolute i.e. devoid of all attributes or qualities. Therefore, his 'Qualified monism' also can be termed as 'Concrete Monism'.

Though *Brahman* is ultimately real for Rāmānuja, It is not devoid of *jīva* and *jagat* whereas *cit* and *acit* are the parts of *Brahman*. So *jagat* is not at all illusory for him but as a part of *Brahman*, it is very much real unlike Śaṅkara who calls *jagat* as illusory (*mithyā*). *Cidacit* forms the body of *Brahman*.¹⁴ In Rāmānuja's system of philosophy, the Lord (*Nārāyaṇa*) has two inseparable *prakāras* or modes, namely, the world and the souls. These are related to Him as the body is related to the soul. They have no existence apart from Him. They inhere in Him as attributes in a substance. They are termed as *Viśeṣaṇas* or attributes. The Lord is their indweller (*antaryāmin*). He is the *Viśeṣya* or that which is qualified.

Though *cidacit* is said to be the body of *Brahman*, it is not tainted by blemishes of *cidacit*. They are related to *Brahman* by inseparable relation (*aprthaksiddhi*) with each other. Just as blueness of the lotus is inseparable quality of the lotus. The relation between *jīva* and *Brahman* is explained in following way by Rāmānuja :

- *Śarīra-śarirī-bhāva* (body/indweller)
- *Prakāra-Prakāri-bhāva* (attribute or mode/substance)
- *Śeṣa-Śeṣi-bhāva* (owned/owner)
- *Aṁśāśī-bhāva* (part/whole)
- *Ādhārādheya-bhāva* (supporter/supported)
- *Niyāmya-niyāmaka-bhāva* (controlled/controller)
- *Rakṣya-rakṣaka-bhāva* (redeemed/redeemer)

God is real and independent but the reality of world is utterly dependent on *Brahman*. According to Śaṅkara, all manifestations and distinctions seen in the world are illusory. Rāmānuja believed them to be real under the control of *Brahman*. Thus for Rāmānuja, *Brahman*, *cit* and *acit* are three entities,

14 *Subalopaniṣad* VII.1 यस्य पृथिवी शरीरम् ।

individually distinct from each other, all equally real, at the same time all forming a unity, in the sense in which the self and its body form a unity. Rāmānuja being *satkhyātivādin*, has accepted that everything that is perceived is real. In this way, Rāmānuja's doctrines reconcile the various statements in *Upaniṣads*, referring to unity and plurality.¹⁵ Thus, Rāmānuja's system is though known as *Advaita*, he cannot get away from the fact that in his opinion there are three real entities. R. D. Karmarkar says in this regard- 'Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is no *Advaita* at all; it is not *Dvaita* either, it may be called 'Traita' as a matter of fact.'¹⁶ Thus, multifarious reality is accepted by Rāmānuja in the standpoint of *Advaita*.

IV.2. Hegel's Absolute Idealism:

According to Absolute Idealism of Hegel, there is only one Reality i.e. Absolute Idea. Hegelian monism is not the abstract one like that of Śaṅkara in Indian philosophy and Plato and Spinoza of Western Philosophy. Hegelian Monism is different than Absolute Monism of Śaṅkara, Plato and Spinoza. Hegel's Absolute Good is not exclusive of all things but includes all the things of the world in It like that of Rāmānuja's *Saviśeṣa Brahman*. Therefore, Hegel's Absolute Idealism is nothing but Concrete Monism. It is based on the Hegelian concept of 'Concrete Universal'.

Method adopted by Plato for reaching toward 'Absolute Good' from plurality of Ideas is the method of exclusion as shown in the figure with the example of pyramid. After examining the Plato's theory of Idea from the eye of Hegel, following logical fallacies can be produced.

Platonic Ideas do not have any mutual relationship with each other and they are not organically related. Plato has explained the universe in ascending order with the hierarchic structure of Pyramid. It goes smoothly from the base to the apex. This system



15 Ghate, V. S. *The Vedanta*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1981,

p. 24

16 Karmarkar, R. D. *op.cit.* p. xxxii

doesn't work in deduction of lower category from the higher. Ascending from the base towards apex is possible but not vice a versa. Hegel realized that Plato's ideas are mere empty abstractions. Plato has totally ignored the accidental or particular qualities which form the real essence of that particular thing.

Ideas are formed by method of abstraction in Plato's model of Hierarchic Pyramid. Common qualities are arbitrarily excluded from the lower to the higher e.g. suppose a man is at the base of Pyramid. In order to move from the category of 'man' to 'animal', it becomes necessary to deduct the rationality which is *differentia*. Man (Rational animal) - Rationality = Animal (*genus*). As such by this method we can go higher till the 'Idea of Good'. With this systematic abstraction at each stage, we are left with *genus* without *differentia*. Deduction of lower from higher, we require necessary *differentium* e.g. in order to get a man from animal we require *differentium* as rationality. We cannot get this *differentium* from animal because we have already excluded it. Plato's Ideas are abstract, lacked details, lacked *differentia*. Ideas should contain *differentia*, they must be concrete. Plato's Ideas are empty and abstract due to his method of exclusion of qualities of particular object.

Hegel adopted the method of inclusion and considered all the qualities of the object which form the very essence of particular thing. According to Hegel, a 'Concrete Universal' is not reached by stripping away the differences and details which constitute particular things. The process is not from the particular to universal as Plato has followed but particulars should follow from the universal. Concrete Universal is a whole system. Once we know the whole, parts automatically follow from it. There is organic relation between the whole and its parts e.g. Cat- teeth, paws, tail etc. this is the structure of the whole organism. Concrete Universal includes all particulars under it as its essential parts. Parts in the separate sense are mere illusion. Parts should be observed with their connection to the whole. Concrete universal is not obtained by the method of exclusion but by including all other details.

Hegel is a monist because he admits one reality. Reality should be pictured as one organic whole with many things as its members. Idea in its individual sense is unreal. Logical relation of ideas leads to organic unity.

'Absolute Idealism' should not be understood in the negative sense. It is idealism about the 'Absolute'. Hegel seems to regard God as a synonym, or more popular religious expression for the same. In his lectures on the philosophy of religion, he explains that philosophy and religion share one and the same object: the absolute or God (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion I*, 33/1.116).¹⁷

For Hegel, the Absolute is the whole. The Absolute is not something that transcends existence; it is the whole of existence itself understood as a system in which each part is organically and inseparably related to each other. The Absolute, is not the whole of reality conceived as a static, block universe. Instead, Hegel argues that the Absolute is dynamic, continually replenishing or reconstituting itself through the finite beings that make up the infinite whole.¹⁸

The word Absolute is not to indicate any abstract reality as it is assumed by Hegel's predecessors. Hegelian concept of 'Abstract' suggests one sided or partial view of things. He uses the word 'concrete' to indicate a comprehensive view of things which includes all possible considerations as to the nature of the thing itself, its origin, and the relations which it sustains; it is the thing plus its setting.¹⁹

According to Robert Solomon, 'Abstract (*abstract*) is one sided, partial and empty, devoid of content. To abstract is to pick out some aspects of a thing to the exclusion of others, or to make a general claim without fleshing out its details and its context. Abstract does not mean 'theoretical' or 'abstruse.' Whereas Concrete (*konkret* also *wirklich*) is the whole, the thing-in-itself which is opposed to abstract.'²⁰ This leads to the concept of 'organic whole'.

Like Rāmānuja, Hegel also established some inseparable relation between

17 Beiser, F. *Hegel*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 59

18 Magee, G. A. *The Hegel Dictionary*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2012, p. 19

19 Hibben J. G. *op.cit.* p. 12

20 Solomon, Robert C, *op.cit.* p. 276

Absolute Idea and other ideas. This is done by the concept of organic whole i.e. the relation between whole and parts.²¹ Parts have significance only in connection with the whole. They have dependent reality and whole is always independently real.

Worldly objects derive their meaning and function from the whole and the whole is also sustained by its parts. The relation of whole and parts is inseparable relation unlike machine where parts are separable rather it is Living Organism e.g. the limbs and organs for instance, of an organic body are not merely parts of it. It is only in their unity that they are what they are, and they are unquestionably affected by that unity, as they also in turn affect it. Therefore, whole world is one reality guided and sustained by the Absolute Idea which is the indwelling spirit of the universe. Thus Hegel's concept of reality can be put as- 'Whole consisting of parts in organic relation is Real'.

IV.3. Epistemology

Rāmānuja strives hard to refute *Brahman* devoid of qualities as propounded by Śāṅkara's *Kevalādvaita*. Therefore, he proved that there cannot be any knowledge of *Nirviśeṣa* things. In order to refute the concept of *Nirviśeṣa Brahman*, first he refutes the existence and apprehension of any indeterminate object in general. Knowledge involves distinctions and there is no undifferentiated pure consciousness.

IV.3.1. Rāmānuja's Refutation of Indeterminate Reality:

Knowledge is always *Saviśeṣa* (determinate) i.e. comprising of attributes. Rāmānuja refutes *Nirviśeṣavādins* by proving that all *pramāṇas* fail to establish the existence of indeterminate objects.

i) *Śabda* (Verbal Testimony)-

All words are formed by crude word with some particular suffix (Śribhāṣya I.1.1)²². Affixes give particular meaning to the word. Sentence is nothing, but

21 G.W.F. Hegel, *op.cit.* (§ 135), p. 291

22 Śribhāṣya I.1.1, शब्दस्य तु विशेषेण एव वस्तुन्यभिधानसामर्थ्यम् । पदवाक्यरूपेण प्रवृत्तेः ।

the group of particular words. So sentence cannot propound indeterminate object (*Ibid*)²³. Therefore neither the word *Brahman* nor the *śruti* statements regarding *Brahman* also can convey indeterminate meaning.

ii) *Pratyakṣa* (Perception) -

Perception is generally divided into *Savikalpa* and *Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa*. There is no such thing as indeterminate perception according to Rāmānuja. *Savikalpa Pratyakṣa* is fuller and richer perception as compared to *Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa*. Determinate perception is always concerned with the objects having distinct qualities. He defines Indeterminate Perception as perception of an object bereft of some qualities (*Ibid*)²⁴. It is not completely without qualities. All apprehension is in the form of 'this is thus' (*idamittham*) (*Ibid*)²⁵. Therefore, perception cannot give knowledge of Indeterminate object.

iii) *Anumāna* (Inference) -

Inference is always based on Perception. Therefore Inference also cannot prove indeterminate object. *Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa* is the first apprehension of a body among homogeneous objects and the second and subsequent apprehensions are called the *Savikalpa Pratyakṣa*. (*Ibid*)²⁶. In *Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa* there is perception of certain attributes. e.g: When there is a first perception of a cow, one may not realize it is a cow but qualities or special configuration such as triangular form or dew lap etc are present in *Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa* also. These qualities are *saṁsthāna* while cow is *saṁsthānin*. There cannot be the perception of *saṁsthānin* without *saṁsthān* (*Ibid*)²⁷. Configuration (*saṁsthāna*) is

23 *Ibid*, पदसङ्घातरूपस्य वाक्यस्यानेकपदार्थसंसर्गविशेषाभिधायित्वेन निर्विशेषवस्तुप्रतिपादनासामर्थ्यात् न निर्विशेषवस्तुनि शब्दः प्रमाणम् ।

24 *Ibid*, निर्विकल्पकं नाम केनचिद्विशेषेण वियुक्तस्य ग्रहणं. न सर्वविशेषरहितस्य ।

25 *Ibid*, केनचिद्विशेषेण 'इदमित्थम्' इति सर्वा प्रतीतिरुपजायते ।

26 *Ibid*, निर्विकल्पकमेजातीयद्रव्येषु प्रथमपिण्डग्रहणम् । द्वितीयादिपिण्डग्रहणं सविकल्पकमित्युच्यते ।

27 *Ibid*, संस्थानेन विना संस्थानिनः प्रतीत्यनुपपत्तेश्च प्रथमपिण्डग्रहणेऽपि संस्थानमेव वस्तु 'इत्थम्' इति गृह्यते । अतो द्वितीयादिपिण्डग्रहणेषु गोत्वादेरनुवृत्तिधर्मविशिष्टता संस्थानिवत्संस्थामवच्च सर्वदैव गृह्यत इति तेषु सविकल्पकत्वमेव । अत प्रत्यक्षस्य कदाचिदपि न निर्विशेषविषयत्वम् ।

apprehended in first apprehension and in second and subsequent apprehensions along with the *saṁsthāna*, other attributes of that particular *saṁsthānin* are also observed. Thus, Rāmānuja proves that there can be no knowledge of an entity bereft of distinctive attributes. This argument proves that Brahman is *Saguṇa* and not *Nirguṇa*. Therefore, the concept of *Nirviśeṣa Brahman* is totally disapproved by Rāmānuja. It is not possible to know indeterminate Brahman by any means of proof. All *pramāṇas* have their object as qualified by some or the other attributes. (*Ibid*)²⁸

According to Rāmānuja's theory of knowledge, real cannot be a bare identity. It is a determinate whole which maintains its identity in and through the differences. Therefore, S. Radhakrishnan says in this context- 'Śaṅkara's *Nirguṇa Brahman* stares at us with frozen eyes regardless of our devotion and silent suffering, is not the god of religious insight.'²⁹ Śaṅkara's method according to Rāmānuja, leads him to a void, which he tries to conceal by futile play of concepts.

IV.3.2. Hegel's Dialectic Method:

Dialectic method is an ancient method which has its origin in Socratic and Platonic philosophy. The term 'dialectic' is derived from a Greek word which means to argue.³⁰ In Platonic dialogues, after establishing as many as possible arguments and counter arguments, necessary conclusion is deduced. It contains positive, negative statements and affirmative statements which synthesize previous contradiction. Dialectic method is defined in *Republic* as- 'A dialogue between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject, who wish to establish the truth of the matter by dialogue, with reasoned arguments.'³¹

28 *Ibid*, निर्विशेषवस्तुवादिभिर्निर्विशेषे वस्तुनि 'इदं प्रमाणम्' इति न शक्यते वक्तुम्, सविशेषवस्तुविषयत्वात्सर्वप्रमाणानाम् ।

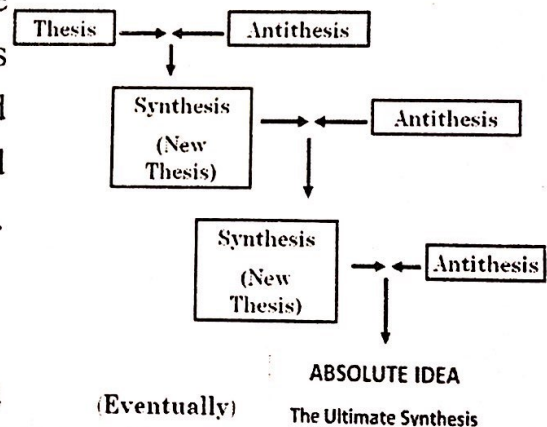
29 Radhakrishnan, S. *op.cit.* p. 683

30 Collinson, D. *Fifty Great Philosophers- a reference guide*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 96

31 *Republic*, 348b

Hegel has introduced 'Dialectic method' for the rationalistic explanation of universe from abstract concept of 'being' to most concrete concept of 'Absolute Idea'. Hegel's dialectic method is often explained in the terms of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis though these terms are not used by Hegel himself. When one side is affirmed as truth it is called as Thesis. Immediately there arises the opposite view with stronger conviction called as Antithesis. Assimilation of two opposites is possible by all-inclusive concept which can accommodate these contrary notions that is Synthesis. This triadic notion keeps the motion of the world. Never ending process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis ultimately ends in the final category of Absolute. Hegel's Absolute is the ultimate synthesis of all positive and negative categories.

Hegel has used terms for this triadic structure as 'the abstract understanding', 'the negative reason', and 'the positive reason'. The first stage generally called 'thesis' is designated by Hegel as the stage of the abstract understanding. The second, the 'antithesis', is a representation of the incompleteness of the first by showing its obverse side, is known as that of the negative reason. The third, the 'synthesis', is known as the speculative stage, or that of positive reason. With this dialectic method, Hegel has given first triad which is responsible for subsequent triads and ultimately this process ends in 'Absolute Idea'.



Being-Non-being and Becoming

First Triad consists of Being, Non-being and Becoming. Hegel starts his dialectic process with an empty concept of 'Being'.³² Hegel calls this very first category as 'Pure Being'.³³ It is just thought, not thought of something else already given. Being is presupposed by any object and therefore it is the first category which is necessary for any object. Whichever object it may be real or unreal must have some sense of being. It is

32 Hegel, G. W. F. *op.cit.* p. 32

33 *Ibid* p. 222

without any features, absolutely indeterminate. It is empty, abstract, without any specific content. It is merely a thought, and as such it forms the beginning. This mere being, as it is mere abstraction, is therefore the absolutely negative: which, in a similarly immediate aspect, is just 'Nothing'.³⁴ According to Hegel, 'being' contains 'non-being'. Though 'being' and 'non-being' are opposed but they are identical. 'Non-being' is deduced from 'being' and at the same time 'being' passes into 'non-being'. It suggests the principle of Identity-in-difference. Hegel affirms that becoming (*Werden*) is the unity of 'being' and 'non-being'. The truth of 'being' and of 'Nothing' is accordingly the unity of the two and this unity is 'Becoming'.³⁵ 'Non-being' passes into 'being' or 'being' passes into 'non-being'. Therefore, 'Becoming' includes 'being' and 'non-becoming' both. 'Becoming' is the first concrete thought, and therefore the first notion, whereas 'Being' and 'Nothing' are empty abstractions.

This triad of 'Being', Non-being and 'Becoming' gives way to subsequent ideas. Hegel seeks logical transition from abstract to concrete, from the more general to the less general idea with the dialectic method. The first category of 'Being' is Abstract, without any qualities. As the dialectic advances, the succeeding categories become more and more concrete till we reach the highest category of 'Absolute' in which all categories are preserved and nothing is lost. Therefore Hegel's system can be termed as 'Concrete Monism'. The higher and more concrete categories contain the lower and more abstract ideas. Lower category also contains the higher categories. Being not only contains 'non-being' and 'Becoming' but also contains other categories including the final category of Absolute. Thus the Final category contains all previous categories so 'Being' is naturally contained in it. Thus, the first category is equal to last category and last also contains all other previous categories explicitly. The Whole World is a system of categories, inter-related dialectically and organically unlike machine in such a way that the Absolute is the reason of Being and all other previous categories.

34 *Ibid* (§ 87), p. 225

35 *Ibid* (§ 88), p.227

Hegel has introduced the most important principle of contradiction. According to him, every positive concept has the seed of its opposite. Struggle of two opposites is harmonized in the positive concept of synthesis. Thus never ending process of development ends in Absolute. Mere 'being' is homogeneous and it lacks details or attributes. In order to be determinate or more concrete, it should be distinguished from the other. Here the principle of 'negation' plays very important role.

'Being' can only be thought as determinate. Only way to characterize determinate being is in terms of some property and property terms can only be made intelligible by being opposed, contrasted to each other. In this, Hegel takes up the Spinozan principle that 'all determination is negation'. The upshot of this first dialectic of 'being' and 'non-being' is thus the synthesis of the two in *dasein* or determinate being. Charles Taylor says in this context - 'Contradiction is attributed to *Dasein* or determinate being via the notion of negation. *Dasein* is the marriage of 'being' and 'nothing' i.e. of reality and negation.'³⁶ Hegel proposes to construct the world of knowledge, and to show how part is related to part throughout, and all parts to the whole in a progressive development wherein every advance marks a growing completeness of knowledge and this is done by the principle of negation.

J. Hibben explains three stages of dialectic as affirmation, negation and then a negation of this negation which is itself an affirmation.³⁷ Thus, Hegel's concept of negation is not purely negative and it doesn't mean extinction or annihilation. It is a positive concept in the sense that it suggests sublimation into a higher form. It is in this way that negation is to be regarded as a means of more precise characterization and determination in the progressive development of thought.

V. Observations and critical remarks:

After examining standpoints of both the philosophers, we come to know

36 Taylor, C. *Hegel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 223

37 Hibben, J. G. *op.cit.* p. 13

that though both these philosophers have tried to solve philosophical problems and challenges faced by them in different space and time, their method and views are almost similar. Of course, there are differences too which are peculiar to their own philosophy and cultural background.

a) Principle of Harmony:

Rāmānuja and Hegel have revolted against their predecessors who tried to solve the problem of ultimate Reality by abstract way. Rāmānuja and Hegel have constructed their philosophy on the basis of synthesis and given importance to harmony. They have given prime importance to practicality along with the logical reasoning. Therefore everything in the world is thought to be real under the control of Rāmānuja's *Brahman* or Hegel's Absolute.

b) Concrete Monism:

Rāmānuja and Hegel come under one roof of 'Concrete Monism'. Rāmānuja and Hegel never admit the existence of indeterminate objects. Even the ultimate reality is determinate, concrete for them. Just as Rāmānuja ruled out existence of indeterminate objects similarly Hegel refuted Plato's Abstract and empty ideas and proved the existence of concrete things comprising of innumerable qualities and details.

c) Abstract to Concrete:

Rāmānuja explains the meaning of indeterminate perception as the first stage of knowledge and it becomes determinate in subsequent stages. Similarly, Hegel has assumed the concept of being which is indeterminate in the very beginning of logic, but gradually it becomes more and more concrete and ends in Absolute. Method adopted by both the philosophers to rule out the existence of indeterminate things is structurally similar though details differ.

d) Inseparable relation:

According to Rāmānuja, there is relation of *apṛthak siddhi* between *Brahman*

and *cidacit*. Surprisingly Hegel also assumes some inseparable relation between Absolute and its parts though he has not given any particular name to that relation. Rāmānuja's *Brahman* or Hegel's Absolute are not devoid of attributes. Rāmānuja's *Brahman* includes *jīva* and *jagat* as the very parts of it. Similarly Hegel's Absolute is the whole having mutually inter-related parts. Parts in its separate sense are mere illusion he says. Reality is one organic whole with its inter-related parts. Just as Rāmānuja's *Brahman* is not devoid of world and soul similarly Hegel's Absolute is the ultimate synthesis of all the contradictory categories of the universe.

e) Realism:

According to Rāmānuja, *jīva* and *jagat* are not illusion. *jīva* and *jagat* are real as far as they are considered as the parts of whole *Brahman*. They are dependent on *Brahman* for their existence. *Brahman* is only independent reality. Same relation is assumed by Hegel between Absolute Idea and other categories in the form of 'Organic whole'. Therefore, everything becomes real as a part of Absolute Idea.

f) Triadic notion:

Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy can be put into Hegel's dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. *Cit* can be called as thesis; *acit* can be called as the opposing concept of antithesis. *Brahman* is the synthesis of *cidacit* which reconciles both the opposing views and thus it contains *cidacit*. Just as Hegel has given place to two contradictory notions in the concept of becoming and ultimately in Absolute, similarly two opposites *cit* and *acit* are also the very parts of Rāmānuja's *Saguṇa Brahman*. Thus, *Saguṇa Brahman* is all-inclusive like that of Absolute Idea of Hegel. Concept of 'triad' is common in both the philosophers. Hegel's dialectic method of philosophy proceeds with the triad being, non-being and becoming. Similarly Rāmānuja has given importance to *tattvatraya-cit*, *acit* and *Brahman*.

g) Ultimate Reality:

Rāmānuja's concept of *Brahman* is not that of a merely last term in ascending

series like that of Plato's Idea of Good, nor that of merely transcendental Absolute existing above and beyond like that of Śaṅkara's *Brahman*. While the conscious and unconscious objects of the universe coexist with God and yet they derive their existence from him and sustained through Him. The Absolute of Rāmānuja is an organic unity, an identity which is qualified by diversity. It is a concrete whole (*viśiṣṭa*) which consists of the inter-related and inter dependent subordinate elements which are called *viśeṣaṇas* and controlling spirit which is called *Viśeṣya*. Similarly Hegel's Absolute is not just the Highest or Supreme Idea among all the ideas or transcendent, indeterminate concept but It is concrete, determinate, having inter-related parts contains in it all the objects of the universe. In fact, Hegel's Absolute is the sum total of whatever exists in this world and not devoid or empty of anything.

Conclusions

Rāmānuja and Hegel propounded their philosophy in different socio-cultural scenario. Rāmānuja's *Brahman* is personified and it is the place of ultimate resort to devotees. Rāmānuja opened the doors of liberation through the means of *bhakti*. Therefore he did not dwell on impersonal *Brahman* which is abstract. Rather he promoted extreme surrender through Highest devotion to personal God. He gave importance to *sālokya*, *sārūpya*, *sāmīpya* types of liberation i.e. enjoying in the vicinity of Viṣṇu, assuming the same form like Him, taking delight of serving Him. Liberation was not possible through mere knowledge devoid of devotion, mediation or surrender. Rāmānuja gave importance to *karman* by considering this world as real.

Hegel's Absolute is known through reason because 'rational is real and real is rational' according to him. There is no place to personal god like Rāmānuja in Hegel's philosophy. At the same time, Hegel's 'Absolute' is not an abstract entity like *nirguṇa Brahman*. He has not forsaken world from the category of reality but has included each and every particle. Thus, both these philosophers have dealt with similar problems and solutions thereof. Rāmānuja and Hegel have defined the reality in new manner. 'All-inclusive' nature is the only characteristic of reality according to Rāmānuja and Hegel.

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