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THE NOTION OF SOUL: DISCUSSED THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ AND THE KATHOPANIṢAD AND THEIR IMPACTS ON ADVAITA VEDANTA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT:

The concept of Ātmā is found in so many perspectives in different sources of knowledge. There is a big controversy among the scholars of different schools of Indian philosophy about the existence of Ātmā. Some of them accept its existence and some are not. But there are also seen some distinctive opinions among them, who accept the existence of Ātmā. The discussion about Ātmā has been continuing since the Vedic age and particularly in the Upaniṣads, this concept gets its significance in a high and depth way. Almost all the Upaniṣads talk about this concept of Ātmā in a very profound way. Among those, the Kathopaniṣad explains the concept of Ātmā with the help of a nice story of Yama and Naciketā. On the other hand, the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, which also bears a very deep philosophical significance, expresses the concept of Ātmā almost in the same way by the advices of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna. That means, quite similarities are seen between the Kathopaniṣad and the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā in establishing the concept of Ātmā. Again, there are nine schools of Indian philosophy divided into two groups as orthodox and heterodox along with their own doctrines. But each of them speaks in the concept of Ātmā and discusses on this. But the Buddhism and Cārvāka do not believe in the existence of Ātmā. But though they do not believe yet they are discussing about it and except this two, all the rest of the schools of Indian philosophy admit the existence of Ātmā. So it can be said that, in Indian philosophy, the concept of Ātmā is a great matter of fact of discussion. The Vedanta philosophy of Orthodox group accepts the Ātmā; the soul is the God- 'ayaṁ ātmā brahma'. So, it can be said that, the Vedanta philosophy keeps the concept of Ātmā in the uppermost position because they say as- except Ātmā there is no multiplicity in this world- 'neha nānāsti kiñcana'. So, here in this present paper attempt has been made to highlight the thought and perception about Ātmā in Gītā and Kathopaniṣad and its impact on Advaita Vedanta school of Philosophy.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is basically based on the Primary sources. In this present paper the texts of Kathopanishad and Srimadbhagavadgita are used for Primary datas. References are put as end notes. The Name of the books and original Sanskrit words and quotations are italicized in main body. The quotations mentioned as endnotes are not italicized.

INTRODUCTION

The common point of view about Ātmā among people is an existence after death which cannot be perceived through our eyes. But some people believe that though Ātmā cannot be seen yet it can be felt i.e., the existence of Ātmā can be felt around us and after that the concept of Ātmā is going to take a very narrow shape where it gets its existence as spirit. It is just a common approach. But the actual concept of Ātmā is not like that. Yes! It is true that there is a big controversy about the existence of Ātmā, but the Upaniṣads and almost each of the schools of Indian philosophy are discussing about this topic. Some of them are accept its existence and some are not. But there are also seen some distinctive opinions among them, who accept the existence of Ātmā. Moreover, the Śrīmadvagavadgītā which is regarded as a guidebook of human life and bears a great philosophical significance contains the conversation about the concept of Ātmā also. The word Ātmā is coming from the original word 'Ātman' which means the inner soul or self.¹ It is a metaphysical and spiritual concept for the Hindus often discussed in their scriptures with the concept of Brahma.² It is one of the basic concepts in philosophy, identical with the eternal core of the personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains release from the bonds of existence. The discussion about Ātmā has been continuing since the Vedic age and particularly in the Upaniṣads, this concept gets its significance in a high and depth way. Almost all the Upaniṣads talk about this concept of Ātmā in a very profound way. In the Śrīmadvagavadgītā also, this concept is broadly discussed. Again, Ātmā is a most important topic of discussion in the Vedanta school of Indian philosophy. So, I am going to discuss about the concept of Ātmā prevailing in Gītā and Kathopanishad and trying to show how their impacts fall in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy.

The Notion Of Ātmā In The Śrīmadvagavadgītā

In the discussion of the notion or concept of Ātmā, it can be said that there is a similarity between the thought of common people and Gītā and that is the existence of Ātmā can be felt. But the concept of Ātmā, established in Gītā is extremely deep and philosophical, which is beyond to the thinking of common people. Arjun's friend lord Kṛṣṇa talks about the original concept of Ātmā in front of Arjuna while he convinces Arjuna to fight with Duryodhana. Actually, story begins from the circumstance of Kauravas i.e. Duryodhana and his ninety nine brothers sent the Pāṇḍavas to the forest for twelve years of exile by making conspiracy with the help of their maternal uncle Śakuṇi. But after completing their exile the Pāṇḍavas were refused to return their kingdom and provoked for fight. The text of Śrīmadvagavadgītā starts from the preparation part of the war between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. When Arjuna saw all his relatives, his kinsmen, his teachers in front of him, who were coming to fight against him, he was totally broke down and disagreed to fight against them.³ He also felt

ashamed to being wise and knowledgeable as ready to do this great sin only because of kingdom and property.⁴ But Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is depicted here as an adviser and guide of Arjuna, tries to persuade for battle and in this regard the great concept of Ātmā is delivered from the mouth of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

In Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, two kinds of Ātmā are accepted, one is the Jīvātmā i.e. the individual soul or self, and another is the Paramātmā, which is regarded as Parambrahma here. According to Gītā, all the living beings are Jīvātmā which are immortal. When Arjuna was worried about all his brothers, kinsman etc., actually he worried about all those Jīvātmās who were in the form of his kinsman by taking their transient body, made by flesh and blood. To remove the cover of ignorance i.e. ajñānatā from his eyes and to give the knowledge of original conception of Ātmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa says as- the wise persons are never disturbed for those, who live and die.⁵ Here the wise person means those who know the actual form of Ātmā i.e. soul and accept its immortality. The destruction of soul is impossible and that is why it is called Avināśī.⁶ The soul cannot kill and also it cannot be killed.⁷ The soul has no birth and death and though the body gets destruction, the soul does not.⁸ To give better explanation Lord Kṛṣṇa gives an example as- people change their cloths when those become old and put new cloths. Likewise, jīvātmā i.e. the individual soul also takes new body after leaving the old body.⁹ Here the body which is constructed by five Mahābhūtas is considered as temporary and has destruction, but the soul is regarded as permanent. The soul cannot be cut by weapons, burnt by fire, soaked by water and dried by air.¹⁰ The soul is avyakta, acintya (beyond our thinking), vikārahita, nitya (always), sasvatah (permanent) and purātana (very ancient).

On the other hand, the existence of the supreme soul i.e. paramātmā is regarded as the ultimate power. Here it is said that to realize the existence of the supreme soul, one has to attain the supreme knowledge. In this way constantly engaging the self in meditation, one perfecting the science of uniting the individual consciousness with the ultimate consciousness, with the mind withdrawn within attains perfect peace by the cessation of material existence into the spiritual luster of impersonal aspect of Lord Kṛṣṇa. So we can say that, in Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa himself identified as the supreme soul.¹¹

The Notion Of Ātmā In the Kathopaniṣad:

The notion of Ātmā in Kathopaniṣad has a great philosophical significance which is quite difficult to understand. But the story of a questioner child Naciketā and his questions to Yama, the god of destruction makes this work more familiar and interesting to the common people. When we go through this work, we come to know that Vājaśravasa, the father of Naciketā organized the Viśajita yajña and in donation to the Brāhmaṇas he gave those types of cows which had drunk water, eaten grass, given milk for the last time and lost all vigor. Seeing his father's unpleasant affairs Naciketā was very upset and asked his father to whom did his father gave him and said- "kasmāi mām dāsyasi?". But his father is very angry with the repetition of son's question and answers him to give him to Yama. The little boy Naciketā is ready to go to Yama to keep his father's oath. When he had arrived, Yama was not at home but Naciketā was waiting for his coming. Yama was very happy to see the dedication of Naciketā

and asked him to fulfill his wishes. Naciketā wished his father become free from anger as his first boon, the knowledge of heavenly fire as his second boon. And as the third wish he said as- there is doubt that when man dies, some say that the soul exists after death and some disagree with this view. So, Naciketā wants to know about the actual concept of Ātmā. In the answer of Yama, we find the direct similarity with Gītā, where it is said as the soul is not born nor die, it is perpetual, eternal and ancient and it is not slain when the body is killed.¹² That means like Gītā here also accepts separate and immortal existence of individual soul i.e. jīvātmā. In the Kāthopaniṣad it is said that the Ātmā is more subtle than the subtle, greater than the great and placed in the hearts of all living beings and who is free from desire and beyond grief behold by the tranquility of his senses that majesty of the soul.¹³ The Ātmā is not to be achieved by many explanations, nor by the intellect or nor by so much learning. Actually, it can be attained by the soul by who it is desired i.e. one who comes over from the bondage of this visible world and attain the real truth, can able to realize the original thought of Ātmā.¹⁴

Impact Of Kāthopaniṣad and Gītā on Śankarācārya's Advaita Vedanta School of Philosophy in the Concept Of Ātmā:

The Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Śankarācārya is a branch of the entire Vedanta philosophy, which is developed through the Upaniṣads, Brahmasūtra of Bādarāyaṇa (systemize the Upaniṣadic teachings) and Gītā. So, it is obvious to fall a great impact of Kāthopaniṣad and Gītā on the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and that is why we find great similarities among them about the concept of Ātmā. Both of the sources of Indian philosophy i.e., Kāthopaniṣad and Gītā accept the existence of Ātmā in two forms. One is the Jīvātmā and another is the Paramātmā and all the Jīvātmās are the part of the supreme soul i.e. Paramātmā or so to say as Parambrahma. Actually, the seed of this concept of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā is found in Vedas where all the deities are considered as the part of a conscious soul i.e. the supreme soul. According to the Pūruṣa sukta of Ṛg Veda, Pūruṣa is the supreme soul and the entire world is the part of Him. In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa again and again says to Arjuna about the reality of this world and tries to convince him to believe only in one truth and that is the ultimate truth i.e. the Scidānanda Brahma i.e. Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy is also establishing its views in the same spirit where they believe in one Absolute, Independent reality which pervades the world of multiple objects and selves. That is why Śankarācārya says as- "brahmaṁ satyaṁ jagad mithyā, jiva brahmaiva nāpara". In the Kāthopaniṣad it is said as- higher than sensations are perceptions, higher than perceptions is mind, higher than mind is Buddhi and higher than Buddhi is the Supreme soul i.e. Paramapuruṣa.¹⁵ The Kāthopaniṣad also says about the Parabrahma and Aparabrahma where in the same spirit the Advaita Vedanta philosophy recognizes as Sagunabrahma and Nirguna brahma which is the two forms of Paramātmā. Ignorance is the main cause of fail to realize the actual thought of Ātmā and this is accepted by all the three sources concerned here. Here it is a noteworthy fact that all of these three sources of knowledge accept rebirth, where the body is just a temporary residence of a soul i.e. jīvātmā and after the destruction of this body the soul again submerges with the supreme soul.

CONCLUSION:

After the above discussion we can come to a conclusion that, the concept of Ātmā i.e., both Jīvātmā and Paramātmā is quite difficult to understand and so much puzzling. Actually, the perception is totally failed here. We can get knowledge about it from some written documents which bear a highly philosophical purpose. From written documents we just get knowledge about it, but we cannot realize the actual concept of Ātmā. If we really want to feel it, realize it we have to apply those Śāstravākyas in our life as Kṛṣṇa says Arjuna to apply in Gītā. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy believes in two types of liberation i.e., Mukti. One is the Jīvanmukti and another is the Bidehamukti. When a person can able to achieve the Ātmajñāna i.e., when understand the Jīvātmā and Paramātmā as inseparable, he/she can attain the Jīvanmukti which is very rear and so much difficult to attain. The Bidehamukti could be attained after leaving the perishable body i.e., after death. In Gītā Lord Kṛṣṇa again and again tries to counsel Arjuna and pushes him to realize the inseparable relation of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā and tries to convince him to kill their perishable body and give them Bidehamukti as their soul can merge with the supreme soul and after getting liberation their soul can again enter in a new body. Actually, it is the rule of nature. The circle of birth and death has been continuing. In the Śrīmadvagavadgītā and Kathopaniṣad, it is instructed to remove the cover from our eyes which see the individual soul and the supreme soul as different. According to the Advaita Vedanta also, we recognize many objects which are actually the part of one Brahma due to our ignorance i.e. Avidyā or Ajñāna which covers up the real Brahma from us and makes it appear as many objects. The question arises in the context of rebirth that- this ‘rebirth’ is of the soul or is it of the body. If the rebirth is of the soul than it contradicts the views that soul has no birth and death. Again, if we think about the rebirth of the body than question arises that the rebirth of perishable body does not seem likely. If this concept is stated for a new body than why does the word ‘rebirth’ use instead of ‘birth’. That means a complex network of question arises in the view of rebirth. At the end of my conclusion, I can say that all of these three sources concerned here accept the whole world is just our illusion and reflection of the Supreme soul.

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tān samīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān vandhūnavasthitān/
kṛpayā parayāviṣṭau viśīdannidamavravīt/
dṛṣṭemaṁ svajānaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ yuyutsumṁ samupasthitaṁ/
sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ ca pariśuṣyati
vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate/ Śrīmadvāgavadgītā.1.27-29
aho bata mahatpāpaṁ kartuṁ vyavasitā vayanān/
yadrājyasukhalobhena hantuṁ svajānamudyatāḥ// ibid., 1.45
gatāsūnagatāsūnśca nānuśocanti panditāḥ// 2.11
avināśī tu tadviddhi yena sarvamideva tatan/
Vināśamavyasyāsyā na kaścit kartumarhati//2. 17
ya enaṁ vetti hantāraṁ yaścainaṁ manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate/ 2.19

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nayaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ/
ajo ntyaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre// 2.20

vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛhṇāti naroparāṇi/
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇā-
nyanyāni saṁyāi navāni dehī // 2.22

nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ/
na cainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ //
yuñjannevaṁ sadātmānaṁ yogī niyatamānasah/
Śāntim nirvāṇaparamāṁ matsaṁsthāmadhigacchati//
Kāthopaniṣad.1.ii.18

anoraṇīyān mahato mahīyān
Ātmāsya jantornihito guhāyām/
tamakratuḥ paśyati vīteśo
dhātuprasādānmahimānamātmanaḥ//

nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena/
yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhya-
stasyaiṣa ātmā vivriṇute tanūm svām//

indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyasca param manaḥ/
Manasastu parā buddhībuddherāmā mahān paraḥ//
mahataḥ paramavyaktamavyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ/
puruṣāna param kiñcit sā kāsthā sā parā gatīḥ// Kāthopaniṣad.1.3.11

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