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THE CONCEPT OF 'WAHDAT-UL-WUJUD': IDEOLOGICAL SHARING
BETWEEN THE BHAGAVAD GITA AND MUSLIM SUFISM

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes and gauges the common ideologies between the Bhagavad Gita on Muslim spiritual thought of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. The Bhagavad Gita is a sacred book of Sanātana Dharma. It contains thoughts about God, human being, the universe, life and the afterlife. The main and central idea is the reality of God that later influenced many philosophies and spiritual disciplines. There is also 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' in these spiritual streams which the Muslim Sufis presented in a coherent system of thought. Surprisingly, there seems to be a deep resemblance between the ideas presented in the Bhagavad Gita and the Sufi intellectual tradition of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud', which is not only in terms of thought, but also in terms of transmission, words, and terminology. Some scholars have pointed out this intellectual similarity. In addition, the translators and interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita have also presented the views of Sufis in their interpretations. This article gives a comprehensive overview of the effects of the Bhagavad Gita on the Sufi idea of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' and identifies aspects that are important in terms of intellectual sharing.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the holiest divine scriptures of Sanātana Dharma. The book, consisting of 700 verses spread over 18 chapters, is actually a part of Mahabharata from chapters 23 to 40. In the famous battle of Mahabharata, when Kurus and Pandus stand face to face with their respective armies, Arjuna, the Pandu warrior, takes a look at the anti-Arjuna Kuru army where he sees his grandfather, uncle, teacher, cousin brothers, relatives and other respected personalities in opposition lined up he becomes emotional and asks his charioteer Lord Krishna how they could paint their hands with the blood of their loved ones. He refuses to take part in this war. Lord Krishna replies that it was their duty to punish the oppressor for his oppression and that this duty cannot be neglected. The dialogue between the two continues and finally Arjuna agrees to participate in the war and fights with such fierceness that the tyrant Kurus are defeated. This long dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna actually comprises the text of the Bhagavad Gita. This Sanskrit poem has the status of a basic scripture in Hindu Dharma. However, with its numerous translations in many world languages, it has reached every corner of the world. Its admirers include people from across the globe irrespective of religion and nationality.

'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' is a mystical belief professing everything seeable in this world as a different form of the real Creator and as a part of the existence of the real Creator. Mohi-ud-Din Muhammad Ibn-e-Arabi Al-Hatami Al-Ta'i Al-Andalusi (1240-1165) is a prominent Sufi, Arif, researcher, scholar of the Islamic mysticism. Although the intellectual tradition of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' can be traced back to the beginning of Islam, he is the first thinker to push it into a coherent intellectual system. He is the first also to introduce the concept of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. He is remembered by the name of Sheikh-e-Akbar and all the sheikhs are convinced of their submission to his position. He was born in the city of Mursiya, Andalusia, on the 27th of Ramadan, 560 AH, in 1165, to a distinguished Arab family. In Seville he had the good fortune to follow in the footsteps of eminent scholars of his time. He was also a high profile poet. In Makkah, his poetry reached its zenith. He wrote the explanation, "Zakhair-ul-Aalaq", of his Diwan, in which he proved that his poems did not deviate in the usual way from the conventional method of Sufism. His contemporaries have written extensively on his mystical interpretations, and later, his views have been widely debated. Other important Sufis related to 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' include Fakhr-ud-Din Razi, Izz-ud-Din bin Abdul Salam, Shahab-ud-Din Suhrawardi, Saad-ud-Din Hamwi, Kamal-ud-Din Zamalkani, Ibn-e-Asakr, Ibn-e-Najjar, Ibn-e-Dabithi, Abu Yahya Zakaria bin Muhammad bin Mahmood Ansi.

Some scholars on spiritual philosophical discourses and some translators and interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita have pointed to the intellectual similarities between the Bhagavad Gita and 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud', but no comprehensive scholarly work has emerged to test the common ideologies between the Bhagavad Gita and 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. There is a need for a comprehensive scholarly study to consider the extent to which the Bhagavad Gita has influenced the idea of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' and the echoes of the Bhagavad Gita's thoughts through the minds of Muslim Sufis.

ANALYSIS

Man has always pondered over his existence and his creator, the real Creator. He is a seemingly invisible being, but His appearance affects everything. Philosophy, science and religion have been discussing such issues in their own way, but if a class has reached the most important conclusion, it is the spiritual class. That is why man has been inclined towards spirituality in search of eternal truth. It is very difficult to give a definite definition of spirituality, but in general it refers to the attachment to sacred beings or concepts, spiritual experiences and observations beyond reason and senses, meditation, abandonment of the world, and asceticism and self-control. In ancient times, spirituality came into being through the combination of religion and mysticism.

Commonalities between Hinduism and Muslim Epistemology

The common values of the spiritual people of these religions were the same, but under the influence of their respective religions, the nature of the holy figures, the methods of asceticism and spiritual experiences varied. But the primary purpose was to seek peace of mind, rising above the legal aspects of religion and outward rituals and self-exploration. Spirituality deviates from religious beliefs, outward identities, rituals; and the highest values of humanity, such as love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and the solace and comfort of man, inward and outward, are its goals. This is a mystical theory that claims that various phenomena of the world are manifestations of the Creator's very existence. It is necessary to first interpret the word 'existence': So it will be 'intuitive' that is there will be some evidence for its essence from outside or this existence will be 'optical' that is there will be no evidence for its essence from outside. God is the universe and the universe is God.

Hinduism is generally regarded as a polytheistic religion but, according to the Hindu scholars who are familiar with their books, a Hindu should worship only one God. The common belief of Hindus is that they believe in Pantheism. The theory of phenomenology or cosmology states that everything, whether animate or inanimate, is blessed and inspired. That is why Hindus consider trees, sun, moon, animals and even human beings to be the images of God.

The basic philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita answers the question of God's reality and guides mankind to reach Him through three possible ways: Jinan Marg (Method of Knowledge); Bhakti Marg (Way of Love); and Karma Marg (Way of action). In the Bhagavad Gita, all the mysteries and secrets of Vedanta Sufism (Sufism described in the Upanishads) are explained in detail, which are summarized as follows: Make God your goal; Love it so you can get it; God lives in the hearts of His lovers; He who wants it must see it; Live for it all your life; Do good deeds, but with the intention that God be pleased with you; Love all human beings; This world is God's platform; and that Everything is a manifestation of God. The Bhagavad Gita, in the light of above guidelines, can be considered a very important book of Sufism, because that it teaches a lesson on how to live life and how to deal with its problems. It seems that Lord Krishna, like a perfect guru, is teaching his disciple (Arjuna) how to follow the path of conduct. According to Jayram: "It is a discourse by God for his devotees teaching them how they should live in the battlefield of life in his service as part

of their Dharma, performing selfless actions as an offering or sacrifice, and work for their liberation. The scripture clearly states that all this is God. There is nothing other than Him. Since he creates things and beings out of himself and in himself, everything here is infused with his presence” (<https://www.hinduwebsite.com/gita/wisdom/gita-day53.asp>).

Looking at the ideology of Sufism in the Bhagavad Gita, it is worth it to gauge the effect it has had on Muslim Sufism and observe the level of similarities between the concept of God given in this divine scripture and the tradition of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. Some interesting questions are: What are the common values between the Bhagavad Gita and Muslim Sufism? How are these ideas interpreted in the Bhagavad Gita and from what angle have Muslim mystics made them part of their teachings? What are the ways of mental harmony at the level of society based on sharing the Bhagavad Gita and ideas of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'?

Concept of God presented in the Bhagavad Gita is not very different from the concept we find in the traditions of Muslim Sufism, especially in 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. The Muslim Sufis, associated with this school of thought, have interpreted God, His existence, and His relation to the universe in the same way as did Hindus centuries ago as reflected in the pages of the Bhagavad Gita. According to Iqbal, the Ibn-e-Arabi style of the interpretation of the holy Quran is similar to that of Lord Krishna's explanations: "Sheikh Mohi-ud-Din Ibn-e-Arabi Andalsi interpreted the Quran from the same point of view that Sri Krishna interpreted the Bhagavad Gita, which had a profound effect on the Muslim thought. Sheikh-e-Akbar's knowledge and grace and his great personality made the issue of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud', of which he was a tireless commentator, an integral part of the Islamic imagination. Ohad al-Din Kirmani and Fakhr al-Din al-Iraqi were greatly influenced by his teachings, and gradually all the poets of the fourteenth century became like-minded" (1993, p. 3).

If we look at the teachings of the Muslim Sufis, especially that of the idea of Wahdat-ul-Wujud, it becomes clear that the existence of the universe is not separate from God. The real and complete existence in this universe belongs only to the Almighty, and everything else is unstable, perishable and incomplete because it will perish one day or the other, because everything in its existence is due to the Almighty's needs. All the objects we see in this universe, despite their existence, have no existence of their own prior to the existence of Allah. Therefore their existence is null and void. Shibli wrote in Sawanh-e-Maulana Rum (Biography of Maulana Rum): "The meaning of 'Tauheed' (declaring God's oneness) is that there is no god but one God, and there is no other partner in the essence and attributes of God, but the meanings of this word change in the dictionary of Sufism: that there is nothing in the universe other than God, or that everything that exists is divine., is called 'omnipresence', Although this is the real subject of Sufism, its interpretation is so delicate that if there is even the slightest deviation, this problem is exactly the same as atheism" (p. 34).

The Bhagavad Gita's Approach to Divine Reality

The study of the Bhagavad Gita is essential for understanding the concept of God in cultural spirit as it deals, in detail, with the great philosophical and subtle discussions of monotheism, polytheism, unity of religions, creation of the universe, cognition, soul, and changes in style. The philosophy of worship practice and arithmetic is given in the style of a dialogue between Lord Krishna and the Pandu warrior, Arjuna. Shri Krishna appears on the battlefield as a psychologist trying to answer Arjuna's questions and resolve his mental conflicts through proofs lodged in intelligence.

In the light of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, the real existence belongs to God alone and there is no existence other than His. This universe is the very essence of God. That is, God and the universe are one and the same, and this universe is the manifestation of the essence of God; born of God and will return to Him. According to this theory, the universe and God are one. There is no concept of a universe separate from God. The relationship of the meaning of the universe to God makes both as integral part of each other. Every particle of the universe bears witness to the Oneness of God on the basis of its unity. There is not a single one of the hundreds of things in the world that does not bear witness to the essence and truth in its form. Monotheism is not that God is one, but monotheism is that there is no being in the universe other than Him and all creatures are part of His essence and do not separate the creatures from His essence. It is preached in the Bhagavad Gita:

Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego are the eight components of my material energy.

Such is my inferior energy. But beyond it, O mighty-armed Arjun, I have a superior energy. This is the *jīva śhakti* (the soul energy), which comprises the embodied souls who are the basis of life in this world.

Know that all living beings are manifested by these two energies of mine. I am the source of the entire creation, and into me it again dissolves. There is nothing higher than myself, O Arjun. Everything rests in me, as beads strung on a thread. I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti, and the radiance of the sun and the moon. I am the sacred syllable Om in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether, and the ability in humans.

I am the pure fragrance of the Earth, and the brilliance in fire. I am the life-force in all beings, and the penance of the ascetics. O Arjun, know that I am the eternal seed of all beings. I am the intellect of the intelligent, and the splendor of the glorious.

<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/7>

In Sheikh-e-Akbar's metaphysical thoughts same teachings are found that God is one and his existence is in the whole world. Both his books *Fasus-ul-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) and *Fatuhah-e-Makkia* (The Makkian Illuminations) make this point time and again that the personal existence belongs only to Allah Almighty, Who is One and Self-Existent. Everything else is a manifestation of

the Real Being. The existence of nothing but its existence is real and original. Existence is known to exist, but not inwardly. Ibn-e-Arabi uses the term “Wujud” (existence) to refer to God as a necessary being. He attributes the term to everything other than God, but insists that existence has nothing to do with things in the universe. Rather, things take ablution from God, just as the earth receives light from the sun. The problem is how to properly attribute existence to things, called ‘entities’. From the point of view of Tanzeeh, Ibn-e-Arabi declared that existence belongs to God alone. He writes in his book Fasmus-ul-Hikam (Bezels of Wisdom): “He who calls the Creator and the creatures two is a polytheist and he who calls both one is a monotheist” (1981, p. 148). He also wrote in his book Fatuhat-e-Makkia (The Makkan Illuminations): “The Almighty is God Himself and the worshipper Himself” (1981, p. 30). The manifestation of God and human as one does not mean that God and man are one or their position is one or they can be one, but it is an expression of a spiritual condition, otherwise in fact man cannot reach the level of God and God cannot descend to man’s level. Ibn-e-Arabi explains this point with the help of a metaphor when he writes in his book Fatuhat-e-Makkia (The Makkan Illuminations): “Dust has nothing to do with the holy world, but it is a spiritual condition that befalls man” (p. 40).

Wahdat-Ul-Wajud in Classical Urdu Poetry

Common Ideology of Bhagavad Gita and wahdat-ul-wajud about God can be seen as a philosophical tradition in classical era of Urdu poetry. Poets express their ideas in such a way that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and Wahdat-ul-Wujud are clearly reflected in them. Meer (1995, p 29) says in a verse:

گل و آئینہ کیا ، خورشید و ماہ کیا
جدھر دیکھا ، ادھر تیرا ہی رُو تھا

Gul –o- Aina kia, Khurshid-o -Mah kia
Jidhar dekha, udhar tera hi roo tha
What to say of Flowers or Mirror, Sun or Moon,
Wherever I could see, it was only Thy countenance.
Dard (2010, p 150) interprets this idea in his verse:

جگ میں آکر ادھر ادھر دیکھا
تو ہی آیا نظر جدھر دیکھا

Jag me aa kar, idhar udhar dekha
Tu hi aya nazar, jidhar dekha
World is permeated with Thy presence
Every particle saturated with Thy essence.
Similarly, Ghalib (2009, p 80) says in his verse:

اصل شہود و شاہد و مشہود ایک ہے
حیراں ہوں، پھر مشاہدہ ہے کس حساب میں

Asl-e-shahud o shahid o Mashhud ek hn
Heran hun phir mushahida hy kis hisab me.

When true Witness & Evidence merge in Oneness,
This is to be wondered how observation stands justified.

Negation of Self in the Bhagavad Gita and Wahdat-ul-Wujud

In the Bhagavad Gita this divine message is repeatedly given that man never finds reality if he does not negate his wishes. He falls into a spiritual condition when he rejects his desires. The Bhagavad Gita gives the philosophy of the division of merciful and satanic forces. The person who is born with compassionate qualities has fearlessness, purity of mind, self-control, non-violence, humility, power of forgiveness and absence of jealousy and pride. Such a person does not show cunning, deceit and arrogance by handing over unsatisfied desires but has good intentions. Although the negation of unsatisfied desires is repeatedly preached in the Bhagavad Gita but this message is focused especially in chapters 4, 5 and 18.

Free from expectations and the sense of ownership, with mind and intellect fully controlled, they incur no sin, even though performing actions by one's body. Content with whatever gain comes of its own accord, and free from envy, they are beyond the dualities of life. Being equipoised in success and failure, they are not bound by their actions, even while performing all kinds of activities. They are released from the bondage of material attachments and their intellect is established in divine knowledge. Since they perform all actions as a sacrifice (to God), they are freed from all karmic reactions.

(<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/8>)

The Supreme Lord said: Both the path of karm sanyās (renunciation of actions) and karm yog (working in devotion) lead to the supreme goal. But karm yog is superior to karm sanyās.

The karm yogis, who neither desire nor hate anything, should be considered always renounced. Free from all dualities, they are easily liberated from the bonds of material energy.

(<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/5>)

The Supreme Divine Personality said: Giving up of actions motivated by desire is what the wise understand as sanyās. Relinquishing the fruits of all actions is what the learned declare to be tyāg.

Some learned people declare that all kinds of actions should be given up as evil, while others maintain that acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance should never be abandoned. (<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/18>)

Negation of desires is a focal point in teachings of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. The negation of man's desires for connection with God is the basic point of the philosophy of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. To describe this point Sufis commonly use a term 'Nafs'. It is an Arabic word that means inner self or soul. Not only does the word have many meanings in religious documents but it is also used in

common parlance on a number of different occasions. According to a group of scholars, these two are the same words, while others describe them separately from each other. There is no philosophical or religious reason for keeping them separate nor is it intended to represent any one school of thought, but here they are kept separate in terms of the material contained in them. According to Wahdat-ul-Wujudi Sufis, there are three levels of 'Nafs':

1. 'Nafs-al-Ammara' (The inciting 'Nafs'). "In its primitive stage the 'Nafs' incites us to commit evil; this is the 'Nafs' as the lower self, the base instincts" (Schimmel, 1975, p, 112).
2. 'Nafs-al-Luwama' (Self accusing 'Nafs'). "This is the stage of 'Nafs' where the conscious is awakened and the self accuses one for listening to one's ego. One repents and asks for forgiveness" (Al-Haqani, 2004, p 102).
3. 'Nafs-al-Mutmaina' (The 'Nafs' at peace). "This is the ideal stage of ego for Muslims. On this level one is firm in one's faith and leaves bad manners behind" (Al-Haqani, 2004, p 103). At this stage, the followers of Sufism have freed themselves from all material and worldly problems and are satisfied with the will of God.

In teachings of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' man attains connection with God only when he is liberated from 'Nafs-e-Ammara'. He gets rid of his material existence and becomes part of God's enlightened being. Ibn-e-Arabi wrote in *Fatuh-at-e-Makkia* (The Makkan Illuminations): "A celestial light descends, burning all his worldly desires and emotions" (1981, p. 40).

The impact of the Bhagavad Gita on 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud' cannot be overlooked that many Urdu translators and commentators of the Bhagavad Gita have interpreted the ideas presented in this spiritual book in the light of Islamic mysticism. Some translators have used the terms of Sufism for the titles of their translations as well as for the titles of certain chapters within the book. In the same way have the mystical ideas been used in discussions over the book.

Hussn-ud-Din has titled his 1934 translation as "Naghma-e-Uluhiat" (Divine Song) and some chapters have also been titled on mystical terms like "Ilm-o-Irfan ka Falsafa" (Philosophy of Knowledge and Mysticism), "Hama az oost ka Falsafa" (Philosophy of Everything from God), "Mukti or Tark-e-Alaiq ka Falsafa" (Philosophy of Salvation and Renunciation). These titles are purely based on the understandings of the mystical terms related to the Muslim idea of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. Munawar Lakhnavi titled his 1935 translation as "Naseem-e-Irfan" (Breeze of Wisdom). 'Irfan' is a mystical term which means knowledge of God. It is highest form of mystical experience. He has expressed the concepts of the Bhagavad Gita through the lens of the ideology of 'Wahdat-ul-Wujud'. He has used terms of Sufism in a very fine way. (1935, p. 95)

Based on the similarities between the ideas of the Bhagavad Gita and Muslim Sufism, some scholars have also suggested that Lord Krishna is a prophet of God. Mohammad Ajmal Khan (1935) is one of the fine Urdu translators of the Bhagavad Gita. In his very scholarly preface to his translation he records: "The Muslims believe that Allah sent one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets for the welfare of mankind and the assumption that Lord Krishna is also a

prophet of God cannot be improbable. It is clear from the conduct and character of the Muslim Sufis and Saints that Sri Krishna is likely to be an elder and a reformed notion of them. Similarly, Maulana Abdul Bari has said that given the circumstances of Sri Krishna, it is clear that he may be a prophet of India, because of the Quranic principle that there is a guide for every nation. A Prophet is sent to every country and nation, and it is inconceivable that India should be exempt from this view. That is why most of the religious leaders have specially worshiped and sacrificed at Hindu holy places” (p. 20).

Khan (1935) has also sought intellectual commonalities in the Bhagavad Gita in the light of mystical ideas conversant with the idea of ‘Wahdat-ul-Wujud’. According to him “there are different levels of monotheism in Islamic mysticism. Similarly, there are many types of monotheists. For example, “Wahdat-ul-Wujud” and “Wahdat-ul-Shahud” are similar to the two branches of Vedanta. Sufis related with “Wahdat-ul-Wujud” are those who believe in unity of existence. They believe that all the beings in the world are one and the same. There is nothing other than God, but there is a difference in form. In fact everyone is the same. In this state, the light of the seeker becomes a part of the great light of God which illuminates the whole world. At that time, the witness and the witnessed become one” (p. 49).

CONCLUSION

The Bhagavad Gita is Lord Krishna’s message to the people of India. It is a philosophical and religious song and sheds light on the specific imagination of India. Its teachings are the philosophical basis of Hinduism. The effects of the ideas presented in this spiritual book about God, the universe, and man are universal. If we look at the spiritual ideas of ‘Wahdat-ul-Wujud’ in this context, there is no denying the fact that there are striking similarities between the various ideas and that they have a profound effect on the Sufi tradition of Muslims. Who is God? How did he create this universe? What is the relationship between God’s existence and the universe? Is the universe a reflection of God’s existence or is the whole universe God? These are the questions that are answered in a very interesting manner in the form of a dialogue in the Bhagavad Gita and the way in which these thoughts are explained by Lord Krishna is seen in the form of ‘Wahdat-ul-Wujud’ among Muslim Sufis. The echo of Lord Krishna’s teachings is evident in the intellectual themes, words, terminology and scientific approach of the Muslim Sufi ideology of ‘Wahdat-ul-Wujud’, and in some places it seems as if the Muslim Sufis are merely translating the thoughts from the Bhagavad Gita.

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