UNIT 11: RĀMĀNUJA'S VEDĀNTA: CONCEPT OF GOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Rāmānuja's Concept of God

11.4 Significance of God

- 11.4.1 God is qualified (visista)
- 11.4.2 God is Trisatvatmaka
- 11.4.3 God has internal distinction (Svagata Bheda)
- 11.4.4 Aprthaka sidhi
- 11.4.5 God is the cause of the world

11.5 Rāmānuja's concept of God (Thesim)

11.6 Forms of God

- 11.6.1 Archa.
- 11.6.2 Vibhava
- 11.6.3 Vyuha
- 11.6.4 Susksama
- 11.6.5 Antaryami

11.7 Let us sum up

11.8 Further readings

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.10 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- explain the non-dualistic philosophy of Rāmānuja
- describe the concept of God.
- discuss the important significance of God.
- explain why Rāmānuja's concept of God is theism.
- discuss the various forms of God.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

Rāmānuja is one of the greatest Vaisnava thinker in India. In 10th century, the vaisnava culture was popularized among the Tamils. In that time even the famous scholars of Sanskrit also contributed a lot for the upliftment of vaisnavite among the Tamils. They were honoured as Acaryas. Among them Rāmānuja is the most prominent.

The chief aim of Rāmānuja is to reconcile the thought of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sụtra with the faith and belief of the vaisnava saint. It emphasizes a philosophical basis for the worship of a personal God, centred round Lord Visnu as a supreme reality. His Visistadvaitavāda is a philosophical attempt to satisfy the intellectual and religious aspirations of man. It is thus a monotheistic philosophy that can explain both transcendence and immanence of God.

This unit introduces to you Rāmānuja's concept of God in details. First let us know about Rāmānuja's life. Rāmānuja was the chief propounder of the doctrine of qualified non-dualism (visistadvaita). He was born in Sriperumbudur in Tamilnadu in the year 1017 and died in 1137. So he enjoyed a sufficiently long life of one hundred and twenty years. He studied Vedānta under Yadavaprakasha. It is said that regarding the interpretation of certain Upanisadic texts, he could not agree with his teachers and thus he started searching for other Guru. He next went to meet Yamunacharya of Srirangam. Unfortunately his guru died before his arrival. Tradition says that he got the divine direction from his teacher to write a commentary on Brahma sụtra of Badarāyana.

The valuable work of Rāmānuja is the Sri Bhasya, the commentary of Brahma Sụtra. He also wrote important treatises like. Gitā Rahasya, Vedānta sara, Vedānta Dipa, Vedārtha samgraha and Gadya trayam. He was inspired by the philosophy of the Gitā, the Agamas, the Purānas, specially the Visnu purāna and the Bhagavata purāna and also the devotional poems of the Alvar saints. He established many temples and developed himself for spreading the vaisnava religion. He was known as the prince of ascetics (Jatiraja), by his admirer.

Rāmānuja's doctrine is known as qualified non-dualism (Visistadvaitavada). His philosophy is called Advaita or non-dualism, though with a qualification (Visesa). Thus Rāmānuja's philosophy is non-dualism (Advaita) as ultimate reality is one, i.e. God or Brahman. On the other hand, it is qualified (Visista) as it speaks of three qualities, viz-matter (acit), spirit (cit) and God (Brahman), of which matter and spirit are dependent on God.

11.3 RĀMĀNUJA'S CONCEPT OF GOD

God or Brahman, according to Rāmānuja is the ultimate reality. For Rāmānuja, God is the highest reality and there is no distinction between God and Brahman. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the Absolute of Śaṅkara is rigid, motionless and totally lacking in initiative or influence, cannot call forth our worship (Indian philosophy part-II) For Rādhakrsnan, the absolute of Śaṅkara remains indifferent to the fear and love of the worshippers. He says, like the Tajmahal which is unconscious of the admiration it arouses, the absolute remains indifferent to the fear and love of its worshippers, and for 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. Thus Sankara's Brahman cannot satisfy the devotional attitude of the devotee.

Rāmānuja, on the other hand, states that God is indeed real and independent and the matter and souls are utterly dependent on God.

11.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD IN RĀMĀNUJA

According to Rāmānuja, the following are the important significance of God.

11.4.1. God is qualified (visista)

God, according to Rāmānuja is the highest reality. He is Brahman and Brahman must be savisesa or a qualified unity. The matter (acit) and infinite spirit (cit) are also equally real. The individual soul (Jiva) evolves out of cit and matter evolve out of acit and both are the integral part of God. God is possessed of an infinite number of infinitely good

qualities like omniscience, omnipotence, all perfect and the like. The Nirguna Brahman of the upanisads really mean that Brahman is free from all qualities good or bad. For Rāmānuja, it means Brahman is free from bad qualities and imperfections. Brahman is Saguna, i.e. full of auspicious qualities. He is real (satya) conscious (jnana) and infinite (ananta). Thus the truth of Visistadvaita is that God is full of all good qualities.

11.4.2 God is Trisattvatmaka

As against the Advaita of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja's philosophy is Visistadvaitavada. He recognizes three Tattvas - God, spirit (cit) and matter (acit). God is one, Supreme Being, having cit and acit as His two indispensible qualities. God is eternal and independent and cit and acit are also eternal, form the part of God and dependent on God. God is thus Trigunatmaka. That like the branch, leaf, flower, fruit etc. though different from one another ultimately constitute the same tree, similarly God, soul and matter, though different in nature yet ultimately get the form of Brahman or God. Thus, Rāmānuja's God is "Trisattvatmaka".

11.4.3 God has internal distinction (Svagata bheda)

According to Rāmānuja, God has internal distinction (svagata bheda). In the Vedānta philosophy, there are three types of distinctions (bheda). They are (i) Homogeneous distinction (sajatiya bheda) i.e. difference between the object of the same class, eg. between one banana tree and another banana tree. (ii) Heterogeneous distinction (Vijatiya bheda) difference between the object of one class and another class e.g. between a tree and animal (iii) internal distinction (svagata bheda)) i.e. the internal distinction between various parts of the same object, e.g. the root, trunk, branch, leaves, fruits etc. of a tree.

According to Rāmānuja, God has no homogeneous difference (sajatiya bheda), as there is no other being, other than God.

Brahman or God is devoid of heterogeneous distinction as there is nothing else other than God. So there is no vijātiya bheda in God.

God has internal distinction (svagata bheda), according to Rāmānuja. God has within Him cit or conscious soul, acit or unconscious matter. The individual soul (jiva) and the world are the internal distinctions of God. They are real like God, forming the real part of His body and soul. Thus, God is a synthetic whole with souls and matter as His parts.

11.4.4 Aprthaka Sidhi

According to Rāmānuja, the relation between God and cit and acit is of Apṛthaka siddhi, i.e. the inner inseperability. Apṛthaka sidhi is the relation between the body and the soul, between a substance and its, attributes, between whole and parts. It is an inner inseparable vital and organic relation. Thus cit and acit are the body of God. God creates the universe with the cit and acit, according to the law of karma. Cit and acit are the energy of God. His inseparable parts or attributes. Thus, there is inseparable relation (aprithaka siddhi) between God and cit and acit.

11.4.5 God is the cause of the World

According to Rāmānuja, God is the supreme soul, unconscious matter and conscious soul. (acit and cit) in all states constitutes His body. God is thus the material and the efficient cause of the world. He creates the world by His mere will (lila) without any effort. Creation, maintenance and destruction are His mere sport (lila). Thus, God creates the world in sports to realize His internal end of sports. As God is perfect, He has no unfulfilled aim or unrealized end. He is all knowing, omnipotent being. He creates the world with the help of the moral law of the soul and make them happy or unhappy. God is the supreme authority of action, devotion and knowledge and the devotee obtain the grace of God through devotion. God is thus the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world.

11.5 RĀMĀNUJA'S VIEW OF GOD IS THEISM

Rāmānuja's concept of God is a kind of theism. Theism means belief in God who is both immanent and transcendent, and is also a Person i.e. a self-conscious being possessed of will. And all these characters are present in Rāmānuja's concept of God. God is thus the object of worship and the goal of our religious aspiration. It is by pleasing God through prayer, devotion and worship, that man can obtain salvation through His mercy.

11.6 FORMS OF GOD

According to Rāmānuja God is expressed in five forms. The "Sarva Darsana Sangraha" of Madhavacarya mentions five forms of God, which is also agreed by Rāmānuja. They are (1) Archa (adoration), (2) Vibhava (Incarnation), (3) Vyuha (manifestation) (4) Suksma (subtle) and (5) Antaryami (Internal controller).

11.6.1 Archa (Adoration)

The worship of idol is called Archa. The idol of God, made of stone, marble, metal or any valuable material are kept in house or any temple are worshipped by the devotee. These are also the expression of God, which may be self revealed or established by any holi person.

11.6.2 Vibhava (Incarnation)

When God descends down on this earth in human form or any other form, He is called Vibhava or Avatara (incarnation). He does so for the protection of good and punish the wicked and restore the dharma. The law Vibhava is of two types - primary (mukhya), when the lord Himself descends like lord kṛsna, and secondary (gauna), when the souls are inspired by the Lords, like Shiva, Buddha etc. Of these only the former are to be worshipped by the seeker for liberation. The example of Vibhava is like the ten avataras of God as Matcha, Kurma, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurāma, Holirama, Varaha, Sri Rama, Buddha & Kalki.

11.6.3 Vyuha (manifestation)

It is of four forms - Vasudeva, Samkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The supreme is full of six supreme qualities as perfection of knowledge, energy, strength, lordship, vigour and brilliance. While the highest spirit, Vāsudeva possesses all the six perfections, the three other Vyuhas possess only two of these. The Vyuhas, according to Rāmānuja, are the forms which God assumes out of tenderness for His devotees. The Sankarsana is the ruler of individual soul having knowledge and energy. The Pradyumna is the ruler of minds having strength and lordship. Thus Aniruddha is for egoity having vigour and brilliance.

11.6.4 Suksma (subtle)

This is also called Bāsudeva - svarupa. It is the "Parā Brahma". He is the highest mode (para) is said to be Nārayana, living in Vaikuntha. He is above the notion of time and is undisturbed happiness. It is the form which is called 'Sadgunya vigraha'. The saint in heaven, can see with their eyes and realize Him and know Him.

11.6.5. Antaryami (Internal controller)

God as the antaryami, dwells in all beings and accompanied the soul in all its inner mind and thus control the souls. The Paramātma lives in different forms in the heart of the Jivatma, are called antaryami. The God in man is like a flash of lightening in the heart of a blue cloud. Thus antaryami is the highest form of God, only the Yogi or Divine soul can see Him, can realize Him.



ACTIVITY: 11.1

- Rāmānuja's philosophy is visistadvāitavada - Discuss

Ans. ……

- Explain how God has internal distinction.

Ans. ……

- Explain the concept "Apṛthaka sidhi.

Ans. ……

ACTIVITY

- Explain the term cit and acit.

Ans.……

- God is the cause of the world - Explain.

Ans.……

- Explain the various forms of God.

Ans.……



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Briefly answer the significance of Brahman or God.

Q 2: Rāmānuja's philosophy is theistic - Briefly answer.

Q 3: God is Trisattvatmaka - Briefly answer.

Q 4: State whether the following statements are True or False

a) Rāmānuja is a non dualist/dualist/qualified nondualist.(True/ False)

b) God has sajatiya bheda/visatiya bheda/svagata bheda.(True/ False)

c) Cit and acit are dependent/independent of God. (True/ False)

Q 5: Write whether the following statements are true or false,

according to Rāmānuja.

a) Cit and Acit are integral parts of God.

b) Rāmānuja is an atheistic philosopher.

c) According to Ramanuja, ultimate reality is unqualified.

Q 6:How God is Antaryami.

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Q 7: Explain the various incarnation (Vibhava) of God.

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

- God is qualified i.e. saguna. God is possessed of many good qualities like omnipotence, omnipresence, perfect, all knowing etc.
- God has three tattvas within Him as God, spirit (cit) and matter (acit).
- God has internal distinctions i.e. svagata bheda.
- The relation between God, cit and acit is of inner inseparability.
- God is both the efficient and material cause of the world.
- Ramanuja is a theistic philosopher.
- God is expressed in various forms.



11.8 FURTHER READINGS

1) Radhakrasnan, S.Indian Philosophy, Vol.-II

2) Chatterjee S.C & Dutta D.M. An Introduction to Indian Philosophy.

3) Hiriyana, M. (1983). Outlines Of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarasidass, Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi-

4) Sharma, C.D. (1973). A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1973.

5) Mishra, Hridaya Narayan. (2006) Bharatiya Darshan (Hindi), Sekhar Prakashan, Allahabad,



11.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: God is visista or qualified unity. God is possessed of an infinite number of qualities like omnipotence, omniscience, all perfect and all good qualities

Ans to Q No 2: Rāmānuja believe that God is theism. God is the object of worship and the goal of our religious aspiration. Man can attain the liberation through the mercy of God, by means of prayer, devotion and worship.

Ans to Q No 3: According to Rāmānuja, God is Trisattvatmaka. There are three Tattvas-God, spirit (cit) and matter (acit). God is one eternal, having cit and acit as his two forms, which are dependent on God.

Ans to Q No 4: a) Qualified non-dualist
b) Svagata bheda
c) Cit and acit are dependent on God.

Ans to Q No 5: a) True b) False c) False

Ans to Q No 6: God is antaryami. God dwells in all beings and accompanied the soul and thus control the sould from within. God lives in the heart of the Jiras and are called Antaryami.

Ans to Q No 7: Emanation or Bibhava is of two types-primary and secondary, primary is that when God himself descends like Lord Visnu, Shiva etc. Secondary is that when the souls are inspired by the Lords like Shiva, Buddha etc.



11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions

Q 1: Who is considered the greatest vaisnava thinker in India?

Q 2: What is visistadvaitavāda?

Q 3: Who was considered the chief propounder of the doctrine of qualified dualism?

Q 4: What is qualified-non dualism?

Q 5: Who was the author of Brahmasụtra?

B) Short Questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)

Q 1: Write short notes on:

a) Svagata bheda of God.

b) Apṛthaka siddhi of God.

c) The Vyuha or manifestation of God.

d) Cit and Acit forms of God

e) Saguna and Nirguna Brahman

Q 2: Briefly explain Rāmānuja's concept of God.

Q 3: What is meant by the concept- 'God is qualified'? Explain in brief.

Q 4: What are the three types of distinctions found in Vedānta Philosophy? Explain in brief

Q 5: What is Svagatabheda, according to Rāmānuja? Explain in brief.

C) Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the Visistvadvaitavada of Rāmānuja.

Q 2: Explain the various significance of God, according to Rāmānuja.

Q 3: "God is the cause of the world" - Discuss

Q 4: Discuss the various forms of God, in Rāmānuja's philosophy.

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