

Concepts of Personal God and Arguments in Favor of His Existence in Different Cultural Traditions: Indian and Western Conceptions*

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Abstract—The concept of personal God in different cultural traditions defines theism, or theistic thought. In India the most distinguished tradition of personal God discourse is known as *ishvara-vada*. Theistic thought appears to be one of the clue trends in history of world Philosophy and it gives the significant sense to the whole culture. The author of this paper deals with common and specific features of theism by interpreting one of the top *ishvara-vada*'s achievements "Handful of Blossoms (on the Tree) of Nyaya" ("The Nyaya-kusumanjali") wrote by Udayana (Udayanachacharya), eminent Hindu philosopher of X century and one of the last representatives of classical Nyaya (Hindu darshana). This crucial text defends the doctrine of Supreme personal God Ishvara. "The Nyaya-kusumanjali" is a highly skilful sophisticated tractate where many arguments and demonstration methods in favor of Ishvara's existing are summarized and synthesized over the whole Indian theistic tradition. Udayana holds severe polemics with *nirishvara-vadins* (anti-theists), i.e. Buddhists, Mimansakas and others, and finely conquers them successfully. General characteristics of both Indian and European theism are that God is conscious, loving Person, sustaining and caring His creatures. Meanwhile the author shows sharp differences between Indian and European theism among which are Demiurges' cosmogony of the former and creativeness *ex nihilo* of the latter, and others.

Keywords—concept of personal God; theism; anti-theism; *Ishvara*; *Ishvara-vada*; *nirishvara-vada*; Nyaya; "Nyaya-kusumanjali" *Vaisheshika*; European scholastics; proofs of God's existing

I. INTRODUCTION

Theism is not only the term for definite conception of thought but also the philosophical category along with pantheism, panentheism and deism. In spite of differences among the scholars in understanding and interpreting of these categories majority of the authors assumes the headline of theism as the concept of a Personal God the Creator and the Supervisor over the world. William Wainwright asserts in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "God's personality is essential to theism" [1]. Theistic thought

definitely performs one of the clue trends in history of world Philosophy and it gives the significant sense to the whole culture. Known both in the West and in the East theistic trend in opposition to sheer pantheism and panentheism, which defend the idea of Impersonal Absolute, demonstrates argumentation in favor of Divine Personality. *Ishvara-vada* — Indian theistic tradition and philosophical discourse about personal God called *Ishvara* was crystallized in several *darshanas* (Hindu systems of thought) and first of all, in Nyaya, *Ishvara-vada* (teaching about *Ishvara*) needs further investigation in the field of Indology as well as comparative study discovering common and specific features of theism.

II. "NYAYA-KUSUMANJALI" REPRESENTS INDIAN THEISM (ISHVARA-VADA)

One of the top *ishvara-vada*'s achievements is "The Nyayakusumanjali" [2] ("Handful of Blossoms (on the Tree) of Nyaya", as translated by A. A. Macdonell [3]) wrote by Udayana (Udayanachacharya), eminent Hindu philosopher of X century. Udayana, celebrated as 'Acharya' in Indian tradition [4], a rare nomination for outstanding 'Teacher'; he was one of the last representatives of classical Nyaya. In early Nyaya (in *Sutras*) there were a few words said about *Ishvara* meanwhile further, in situation of different threats from the side of *nirishvara-vadins* (Indian anti-theists), first of all, from Buddhist philosophers, also Mimansakas and others *Naiyayikas* converted to strong theistic defenders and active disputants against their opponents, conquering them by elaborating many-sided argumentations in favor of God's existence on the basis of logic inference (*anumana*) and other forms of intellectual art. Nyaya philosophers together with *Vaisheshikas*, who were representatives of the school friendly to Nyaya, became masters in rational and logical proofs of *Ishvara*'s being, and that style of argumentation got the name *Ishvaranumana* in Indian tradition.

"The Nyaya-kusumanjali" is a crucial text for Indian defenders the doctrine of Supreme personal God *Ishvara*, considered as Demiurge, Supervisor, Sustainer of the world. Udayana summarized theistic discourse and argumentation from his school (Nyaya became an *ishvara-vada* leader among other *darshanas*), from Yoga *darshana*, *Vaisheshika*

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and earlier theistic trends. "The Nyaya-kusumanjali" presents highly skillful sophisticated tractate where many arguments and demonstration methods in favor of Ishvara's existing synthesized throughout the completely Indian tradition. In accordance to general definition of theism as a doctrine of a Supreme Personal God who immanently conducts the world as well as states transcendently to it Ishvara has similar features in Udayana's discourse. The style of medieval Indian polemicists was lapidary, many words and phrases were dropped as "well-known" (only for medieval times thinkers), therefore, the text appears to be something not accomplished something not clear and needs much of deciphering, interpreting, reconstruction, moreover hermeneutic understanding.

The tractate consists of five parts and like a battle with opponents composed as detailed consideration of each counter-argument from the side of nirishvara-vadins, then by negation of them attacking the intellectual enemies and finely, establishing Ishvara-anumana. For our purpose to demonstrate the common and peculiar features of Indian theism, we choose several counter-positions and their refutations. The oppositions to theistic theory allocated in each of five parts of the text are, first, on the nonexistence of any supernatural cause of another world, i.e. the law of karma (adrishta — the merit and demerit of our actions that causes the results in our present and future life); or secondly, on the possibility of our putting in action certain causes of another world (as sacrifices, for example) excluding God; or thirdly, on the opinion that, even if God does exist, he cannot be a cause of true knowledge to us; or fourthly and fifthly, on the (alleged) proofs of God's non-existing and the absence of any argument to prove his existence.

At first, Udayana argues here as a medieval rationalist continuing Aristotle's reasoning and says, "from dependence", that means there must be a class of causes in general, or causality itself ("The Nyaya-kusumanjali" — further, NK — I. 5) [see 5]. Dependence supposes that all effects have a cause since they are occasional, like the plant produced by the seed. Usual Indian and especially Nyaya example for cause-effect relation is potter producing a pot in which Potter is Ishvara (resembling to Antique Demiurge) and the world as a pot depending of God. Further steps opponent's objection (in the text of NK) that eternal cause (God) can produce only eternal effect, but the world is not eternal, so there is no need in God. Udayana replies that eternity belongs to God himself as well as relation between seed and plant in its conceivable sense is also eternal because is set by Ishvara though all empirical seeds and plants are not eternal, they depend of God's establishing. Then the discussion comes to non-possibility of regress of infinite effects (regressus ad infinitum). Hence, Udayana concludes, "we assert that there is the supernatural cause of the world" i.e. Ishvara (NK. V. 4.) [6].

The second opponent's objection deals with the opportunity of direct human action on supernatural powers beside God in case of sacrifices. This aspect of argumentation discovers the philosophers of Mimamsa as nirishvara-vadins who believed in eternity of Vedas and efficacy of Vedic formulas and rituals. Mimansakas say,

there is no proof of God, since the means of attaining paradise can be practiced independently of any such being; sacrifices, which are the instruments of obtaining heaven, can be performed even without a God, since Vedas possess authority from their eternity and freedom from defects, and we can gather their authority by great saints as Manu and others, and therefore You cannot establish the existence of God [7]. Udayana counters: it is impossible in this case to ignore Ishvara because true knowledge demands any external source (beside Vedas yet) i.e., Vedas are revelation, and revelation supposes perfect Subject who knows all hidden conceivable ideas and all reasonable senses of the words in this revelation (NK. II. 1-2). Further Udayana in this item of polemic adds cosmological argument: since world's composing and destruction take place, and since no one except Ishvara we may trust in these questions, therefore... "After dissolution of this world, when previous Veda was destroyed how next Veda can receive its authority and be translated by great saints?" (NK. II. 3-5).

The third opposition turns to epistemological argumentation and concerns the possibilities of true knowledge of Ishvara. Opponents say, we infer God's nonexistence from His not being perceived, i.e. as we infer a jar's absence in a given room; like a hare's horn God is not a legitimate object of perception. Udayana replies, suppose, God is non-legitimate object of perception, but how you may infer the absence of something from its non-perception. Absurdity of hare's horn does not infer from non-perception of hare's horn (NK. III. 1). So, opponent's argument fails.

The fourth objection that nirishvara-vadins proposed: "God cannot be an authority to us, because he has no right knowledge, as his knowledge lacks such indispensable characteristic as cognizing an object un-cognized before; hence he neither possesses right knowledge himself nor can produce it in us, and who would believe in such being?" (NK. IV. 1). The Nyaya philosopher discovers logical mistake in opponents' statement — the substitution of indispensability/objectivity by novelty in cognitive process: "Cognizing for the first time is no true mark, as it is both too narrow and too wide; we hold right knowledge to be an independent impression which corresponds to the reality" (NK. IV. 1). According to Udayana right knowledge is accurate comprehension and then he appeals to authoritativeness of tradition of his own school Nyaya, in which true knowledge can belong to the being separated from all absence, i.e. God (NK. IV. 5).

The fifth opposition put forward a boastful pretention that there were no arguments in favor of God: "May we not say that there are no proofs to establish God's existence?" (NK. V. 1). That nirishvara-vadin's pretention was impertinent because Indian theistic tradition already had elaborated argumentations in favor of Ishvara's being. Udayana parries that and promote the most famous eight (or, sometimes commentaries account nine) proofs of Ishvara's existing, which are included in the fifth part of NK. In short, they are [for details see 8]: from effects, combination, support, traditional arts, authoritativeness, revealed scriptures (shruti), the sentences thereof, and particular numbers (NK.

V. 2-13), — and "an everlasting omnipotent Being is to be established" [9].

- From effects, cause-effect relations: the earth, and other raw materials must have had a maker because they have the nature of "effects" like a pot; Potter (Ishvara) is a real cause of all things.
- "Combination" is an action of the primal conjunction of smallest parts (paramanu), i.e. atoms at the beginning of a creation, which must have been accompanied by the volition of an intelligent being — God.
- "Support": the world depends upon some Being who possesses a volition which hinders it from falling, because it has the nature of being supported, like a stick supported by a bird in the air. This world is destructible, like cloth that is rent; therefore, it is in need of Ishvara.
- "From traditional arts". This argument means that senses of all words, all skills, "traditional arts" as making cloth, and others must have been originated by an independent and conscious being, from the very fact that they are traditional usages. Ishvara himself teaches first men (sages) how to speak and operate with all the forms of human activity, ishvara-vadins believe.
- "From authoritative": the knowledge produced by Veda is produced by a virtue residing in its cause that can be only a Supreme Soul, or God, because it is right knowledge, just as is the case in the right knowledge produced by perception.
- From holy scriptures/sruti — Vedas. The Vedas have an Author, a Person who has the nature of Vedas, i.e. holy, perfect, etc.
- "From sentences": again, the Vedas have the nature of sentences, like the Mahabharata, a highly intelligent Person whom we can only call Ishvara must have produced the sentences.
- "From particular numbers." After the second argument "from (primal) combination" of atoms, Udayana adds this, because the measure of a binary compound of atoms is produced by number, proportion. Hence, at the beginning of a creation there must be the number of duality abiding in the atoms, which is the cause of all measures and, further, of the entire arithmetic structure of the world. Therefore, we can only assume this distinguishing faculty of calculating as existing in God.

III. COMPARISON OF INDIAN AND WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL GOD

As for comparison of Indian and Western theism Wainwright William does not hesitate to mention their similarities, he also demarks theistic tradition precisely in Vedanta schools and the trends of impersonal conceptions of God (Advaita, Buddhism etc.) [13]. For comparison of

Indian ishvara-vada and Western theism, we need first of all to see the intellectual climate of that medieval epoch. What was the main concern of those philosophers from both the East and the West is sincere conviction to their appropriate religious traditions, intellectual honesty and, naturally strong desire to conquer their opponents. More concretely regarding the proofs of God's existing in Udayana and in Christian scholastics we have to mention typological similarities and, of course differences.

We regard the western proofs of God's in Anselm of Canterbury and in Thomas Aquinas. Anselm, called "first scholastic" and "second Augustine" in his work "Proslogion" put forward an ontological argument from which infers that God is evident to our mind and He is a most perfect and great Being (more great than we can think). On the contrary, Thomas did not assume that God is evident to us, he distinguished between super-natural theology (which appeal to revelation) and natural theology in which logical and rational proofs and argumentations are valid. These positions of this two eminent Western thinkers are quite comparable to Udayana's proofs. The three philosophers, who were living not so far from each other in historical time, wrote in a scholastic manner, controversial, polemic, systematic, careful to every detail of discourse. The three philosophers are spiritual realists, mean, realism of notions: Anselm is an extreme realist; Thomas is a "moderate" one. Similarly, Udayana, as we saw, proceeds from postulate of realism and teleology that all things get their existence only by rational causes, causality itself, support itself, etc., and the Cause of the causes is nothing but omniscient Ishvara.

Likewise, for Anselm the measure of every being depends only on conceivable being, and not vice versa. The formula of ontological argument begins with the words: "...we believe (my marking — E. A.) that Thou art somewhat than which no greater can be conceived" [10]. Here we see that logical truth infers from revelation one. In Udayana we also find the statement about unity of reasoning and revelation in the very beginning of NK (NK. I. 4) [11]. Moreover, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh Udayana's arguments appeal to revelation (Vedas). Then the similarities between Anselm and Udayana end since his first, second, third and eighth proofs are not ontological but cosmological and resemble to Thomas' ones. Especially remarkable is the first proof "from effect" which demonstrates the necessity of the Supreme Cause as well as necessity of the first moving negating regressus ad infinitum that almost copies Aristotelian-Thomism discourse. Visvesvari Amma stresses: "The causal argument of Nyaya-Vaisheshikas for the existence of God resembles the causal and teleological proofs met with in Western philosophy", the views of Gog in of Nyaya-Vaisheshikas "is still theistic insofar as they maintain He bears a continuous relation with the world and is conceived as its Creator and Destroyer" [12].

At the same time, there are many differences between Western and Indian thinkers. In cosmogony, Nyaya represents Demiurges' process of formatting and designing the universe from eternal non-structural elements — atoms; in Christian philosophy God creates ex nihilo, and even primal chaos is created by God. Apart of soteriological

differences between two theistic cultures, we should mention the law of karma, which is natural, deterministic (but not fatalistic), depersonalized way of retribution, supervised by Ishvara. Retribution completely depends of Personal God, who has a power and mercy of total forgiving sins without impact from any deterministic force, as western thinkers believe and approve. Ishvara has a double status as personal- and- impersonal Deity because he is identical to impersonal Atman and called Paramatman (Supreme Atman) that is impersonal Soul of the universe [14].

In conclusion, we have to accept that in contrast to Christian scholastics ishvara-vada of Nyaya-Vaisheshika was elaborated in sharp confrontation with two types of nirishvara-vadins: those, who were the Hindus, and not Hindus. Meanwhile western medieval philosophers held polemics with real or imaginary heretics as revisionists of the main religious tradition.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are general features in Indian and European theism: personal God who is conscious, loving and holding “in his hands” creatures. However, contrast differences between Indian and European theism appear in cosmogony, soteriology, and theodicy and so on, like Demiurges’ or emanative cosmogony in India and creativeness ex nihilo in the West. We also have to accept that in contrast to Christian scholastics ishvara-vada of Nyaya-Vaisheshika was elaborated in sharp confrontation with two types of nirishvara-vadins: those, who were the Hindus, and not Hindus. Meanwhile western medieval philosophers held polemics with real or imaginary heretics as revisionists of the main religious tradition.

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