

Concept of God According to Dvaita Vedanta¹

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Dvaita Vedanta was formulated by Madhvacarya also called as Anandatirtha. This paper outlines the concept of God according to Dvaitins.

Madhva's philosophy conceives of two types of substances, namely, independent (*svatantra*) and dependent (*asvatantra*). The world of diversity is a fact of experience. The reals constituting this Universe are characterized by an order, regulation etc. This proves the absence of any independence for them to act as they please. Thus, the principle of dependence presupposes an independent principle that controls and relates the dependents into a Universe.

Of the two realities *svatantra* or independent reality is that which exists, knows, and acts by its own nature and without requiring another. *Asvatantra* is that which expects some other factor for its existence, functioning etc. In Dvaita it is this independence on the part of God that ensures his supremacy. Thus, God who is equated with Lord Vishnu is not the only reality but is also the supreme reality.

The world and selves are also real, but they are subservient to God. He is endowed with personality, possesses infinite attributes in an infinite degree. He is the creator of the world and he creates the world out of material other than himself. He also controls the world and the destinies of the selves. He enters into matter, energizes it and renders the necessary modifications at each and every stage. He is the determining cause of the nature's various tastes, essences, color etc. It is only purely due to His will that each and every movement in this Universe takes place.

Thus, the dependence of selves and matter on God not only merely refers to His presence but refers to the fact that they owe their very existence to Him. Their existence, and the unalterable and unmistakable laws of nature, planets etc., reveal the greatness, perfection etc., of God. He is endowed with personality as the Supreme Being and becomes an object of worship for the selves as the creator and controller.

God or Brahman in Dvaita is not an abstract principle but is the Divine person. The sum total of his qualities constitutes the personality of God. He is, therefore, *saguna*, that is, possessed of attributes. The two aspects of all excellences (*sarvagunapurnatva*) and the absence of any defect (*sarvadosagandhavidhura*) constitute God's perfection.

Lord's attributes are innumerable in number, and they form part of Him. They are not different from one another also. Although they are not different from God, yet they are distinguished from God.

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God's attributes are not only many but are also varied. In order to have an orderly operation, these attributes are not only to be distinguished from God but also among themselves. For instance, the will of God has two aspects, namely, latency (*sakti*) and patency (*vyakti*). The former is the will to create the world, while the latter is the will to resolve it. If these two are not clearly made distinct then we cannot account for the regular order of creation and resolution. Thus, the orderly arrangement of events in the Universe, presuppose that the various qualities present in God, do not overlap, but are distinguished from one another. This is possible only through the agency of *visesas* in God. It comes to this that Brahman is *sa- visesa*—one who has *visesas*. He is characterized by innumerable *visesas* (*ananta visesatmaka*). God has no gross or material form. Existence (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*) and Bliss (*ananda*) alone constitute His form or body.

Madhva's commentary on the *Brahmasutras* enumerates eight qualities of God. They are creation (*srsti*), sustentation (*sthiti*), dissolution (*samhara*), control (*niyama*), obscuration (*ajnana*), enlightenment (*jnana*), bondage (*bandha*) and liberation (*moksa*). Of these, the first four refer to God's relation to the world and the remaining to his relation to the selves. The functions of redemption of selves, creation, sustentation, and dissolution are performed in the four forms of God called *vyuhas*, namely, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sankarsana, respectively. He assumes visible forms called *avatars* to fulfill specific functions of the world. As the transcendent (Para) he rules everything, and he is the immanent being who guides everything.

Brahman is only the instrumental or efficient cause of creation, destruction etc., of the world order. The causality of Brahman in respect to the world is not through his transformation but like that of a father. *Prakṛti* which is the material cause of the world is dependent upon Brahman. The desire of Brahman to create the world produces a stir in the latent *prakṛti* and sets in motion the process of creation. Just as the desire in a human being can affect physiological adaptations in the form of responses, in the same way, the desire of Brahman can change the original state of *prakṛti* and evolve the world order. The Supreme Being, possessed of infinite powers, enters into various stages of evolution of matter and brings about each and every stage of manifestation of things, Himself. God not only creates, sustains, and dissolves the world into primordial matter but also controls or regulates it. *Maya* which is real is the mysterious power (*acintyasakti*) of God. *Maya* serves as an aid to create, sustain, and dissolve the world.

Regarding God's relation to the selves, it may be said that He is responsible for the selves' ignorance and bondage and for their knowledge and liberation. These are the features that characterize the idea of God in Dvaita which is fully theistic.