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Chapter

सत्ताशास्त्र/अतिभौतिकी : भारतीय व पाश्चात्य

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अखिल भारतीय तत्त्वज्ञान परिषद

सत्ताशास्त्र / अतिभौतिकी

(भारतीय व पाश्चात्य)

:: संपादक मंडळ ::

डॉ.सुनंदा भुसारे

डॉ. सुरेंद्र गायधने

डॉ.सुनील साळुंके

डॉ.प्रभाकर किर्तनकार



अखिल भारतीय तत्त्वज्ञान परिषद

डिसेंबर २०१९

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अनुक्रमणिका

१.भारतीय सत्ताशास्त्र	- डॉ. हेमलता मोरे	.. 007
२.अतिभौतिकीचे स्वरूप	-डॉ. सुरेन्द्र गायधने	.. 014
३.अतिभौतिकीय चिंतन : भारतीय व पाश्चात्य	-विकास गायकवाड	.. 024
४.सत्ताशास्त्रातील अध्यात्मवादी दृष्टीकोन	-डॉ.विजय सोपनराव शेडगे,	.. 027
५.मेटा-एप्रोच (काय आहे?का असायला हवा ?)	-चंद्रकांत सोनवणे	.. 034
६.सैद्धांतिक आणि व्यवहारिक दृष्टिकोनातून 'अंतिम सत्ता':एक मीमांसा	-डॉ. राजेसाहेब मारडकर	.. 039
७.जडवाद : एक तात्त्विक विश्लेषण	-प्रा. हाडुळे धनराज सुभाष	.. 047
८.भारतीय दर्शनातील विश्वाच्या मुलद्रव्या विषयीची संकल्पना	-डॉ.मुवीन शेख,	.. 053
९.भारतीय दर्शनातील आत्मतत्त्व विचार : एक चिकित्सक अध्ययन	-डॉ.नरेन्द्र व. रघटाटे	.. 060
१०.जडचेतनावादाची समीक्षा	- डॉ. सुरेखा अभय आडगावकर	.. 070
११.हिन्दू आणि मुस्लिम धर्मातील ईश्वर संकल्पनेचे स्वरूप	-डॉ. अतुल महाजन	.. 082
१२.चार्वाकांचा सत्ताशास्त्रीय सिध्दांत	-प्रा.डॉ.प्रभाकर किर्तनकार	.. 089
१३.चार्वाकाचा जडवाद	-डॉ. भुसारे सुनंदा रामचंद्र	.. 093
१४.चार्वाकांचे सत्ताशास्त्र : एक अभ्यास	-प्रा. वांगर परमेश्वर शिवाजी	.. 100
१५.भारतीय तत्त्वज्ञानातील चार्वाकांचे सत्ताशास्त्र	-प्रा.अनिता प्रेमराज भोळे	.. 105
१६.बौद्धांची तत्त्वमीमांसा	-डॉ.दिलीप नागरगोजे	.. 110
१७.इस्लाम - ईश्वर संकल्पना	-प्रा. डॉ. गणेश वेळंबे	.. 115
१८.जैन दर्शनातील सत्ताशास्त्रीय सिध्दांत	-प्रा. भुसारे गोदावरी	.. 129
१९.भारतीय वैशेषिक दर्शनातील परमाणूवाद आणि ग्रीकांचा परमाणूवाद:		
एक तुलनात्मक विवेचन	-डॉ. रीना अविनाश पितळे पुराडकर	.. 136
२०.वेदांत दर्शनातील जगत् संकल्पना	-प्रा. शितल रुद्रमुनी येरुळे	.. 143
२१.अद्वैत वेदांताची आत्म संकल्पना	-प्रा.धनराज तुकाराम लड्डे	.. 147
२२.संत महात्मा वसवेश्वरांचे ईश्वरविषयक तत्त्वचिंतन	-डॉ. उद्धव नं. कांबळे	.. 153

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- २३.सांख्य दर्शनातील अंधळ्या-लंगड्यासंबंधी शंका-प्रश्न !
-डॉ.वेदप्रकाश डोणगावकर .. 157
- २४.सांख्य तत्त्वज्ञान (सत्ताशास्त्रीय दृष्टीकोन)-डॉ. आंबटकर वृपाली .. 163
- २५.महानुभाव तत्त्वज्ञानातील 'सत्ताशास्त्र' - डॉ. नवनाथ रासकर .. 167
- २६.वंदनीय राष्ट्रसंत तुकडोजी महाराजांच्या विचारातील तत्त्वमीमांसा
-कल्याणी मेहेरे ..173
- २७.जैन दर्शनातील जीव संकल्पना -प्रा.कु.सोनू मन्मथ स्वामी ..180
- २८.जगाची उत्पत्ती : सांख्यांच्या विचारातून -प्रा.अलका चिखुर्डेकर ..185
- २९.जैन दर्शनातील सदवरस्तुमीमांसा -डॉ. बालाजी मारोतीराव नरवाडे ..191
- ३०.मध्ययुगीन पाश्चात्य द्रव्य संकल्पना -डॉ. सुनील साळुंके ..195
- ३१.लुडविग फॉयेरबाख यांचे ईश्वरविषयीचे मत -डॉ. सुनिलदत्त गवरे ..210
- ३२.ब्रॅडलेचा विश्वविषयक सिध्दांत -डॉ. अजय नामा ..215
- ३३.मार्टिन हायडेगरची सत् संकल्पना -डॉ. बाळासाहेब मुळीक ..220
- ३४.सार्त्रचा अस्तित्ववाद -डॉ. कुलकर्णी स्वाती नागोराव ..225
- ३५.मिल्लची शास्त्रीय कारण संकल्पना -प्रा.डॉ.बाजीराव पाटील ..229
- ३६.कल्पनावाद : प्लेटो आणि बर्ले च्या संदर्भात -डॉ. सुनीता इंगळे ..232
- ३७.वेदांत दर्शनातील ईश्वर संकल्पना - प्रा. दिवे वैशाली माधवराव ..237
- 38.On Good Metaphysics -Dr.Sharmila Virkar ..244
- 39.Theories Of Soul, Karma And Eschatology In Indian Philosophy
-Dr.Vijay Srinath Kanchi ..253
- 40.Theory of Divine Creation in Nyâya and Christianity a
Comparison -Dr.Rajen Lakra ..271
- 41.Understanding the thematic texture of modernity through
Charles Taylor -Dr.Shinumol T.C ..281
- 42.Systematic Exposition of the Metaphysical Doctrines in
Atharvashirsh- -Dhanshree Patrikar ..292
- 43.Ethics and Metaphysics -Prof.Pushpa Deotale ..300
- 44..A Parallel between Shankaracharya and Kierkegaard's
Ontological Philosophy of Three Levels of Existence:
A Possibility? -Dr.Amita Valmiki ..303

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44. A Parallel between Shankaracharya and Kierkegaard's Ontological Philosophy of Three Levels of Existence: A Possibility?

Dr. Amita Valmiki

Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College of Arts,
Science and Commerce, (Autonomous), Mumbai.

Introduction:

“Through the company of the good, there arises non-attachment; through non-attachment there arises freedom from delusion; when there is freedom from delusion, there is the Immutable Reality; on experiencing the Immutable Reality, there comes the state of ‘liberated-in-life’.” -Adi Shankaracharya¹

“The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.” -Søren Kierkegaard²

Adi Shankaracharya, 8th century philosopher and theologian from South India revolutionized Indian philosophy by upholding the Buddhist methodology and argumentation (therefore called Crpto-Buddhist by some, especially by Ramanuja, *prachanna-bauddha*)³ of rationalization; and seems to be influenced by Islamic philosophy of One Real.⁴ His bhasyas (commentaries) on Upanishadic concept of *Atman* and *Brahman* as one; in fact his ideology of *Brahman Satyam, Jagat Mitam* (Brahman is the real Reality [*sat*], and the world is deception) had great impact on the lives of people. Shankara could open handedly accept the (so called) pariah as his Guru (teacher). The episode is well known in Indian philosophical history.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish philosopher,

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is characterized by the following immersion in sensuous experience, valorization of possibility over actuality, egotism, fragmentation of the subject of experience; nihilistic wielding of irony and skepticism; and flight from boredom.” [*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*] b) the ethical level (the limited existential stage that has to be transcended by the highest level namely the religious and that which has to be retained even at this highest level.) c) the religious level (the subjective passion is important, one need not have any mediator in between (like a priest or a clergy) as ‘faith’ is a dominating factor here.)

In an aerial view, one finds that Shankara’s three levels of reality and Kierkegaard’s three levels of existence seem to (if I am permitted to dare) run parallel. Somewhere the *pratibhasika* finds resemblance to the ‘aesthetic level’ where base happiness becomes worth celebrating and cherishing. But they need to be controlled in some fashion and that happens in the *vyavharika* level that finds its parallel in ‘ethical level of existence’. Here an individual is limited, confined to the boundaries of norms and the flight to the transcendental is seen as a mirage. But the final level of reality according to Shankara is *paramarthika satta* that is in accordance to Kierkegaard’s ‘religious level of existence’. Though Shankara throughout emphasizes on knowledge (*vidya*) that will lead an individual to the highest level, ultimately and finally one resorts to **faith**. This is very similar to Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘**leap of faith**’. As Kierkegaard believes “only on the basis faith does an individual have a chance to become a true self. This self is the life-work which God judges for eternity.” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

At this juncture like Shankara, Kierkegaard believes in renewing faith. This repetition of faith is the way the self relates itself to itself and to the power which constituted it that is repetition of faith is the self. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) I am constantly reminded of how in *paramarthika satta* the self gets merged in

the Self (*Brahman*) and the two no more remains two but only 'One non-dual'.

Differences between Shankara and Kierkegaard with regard to their Metaphysical Philosophy:

The teleos (the purpose) of the two are in a way different from each other. Where in Shankara one finds at the transcendental level (the *paramarthika satta*) is equated to *sat-chit-ananda* (pure existence, consciousness and bliss); but Kierkegaard does not guarantee any of this. For Shankara 'being' is more important as ultimately he being a monist; whereas Kierkegaard is ultimately interested in 'becoming'; in *Seducer's Diary* he writes that the seducer is considered as 'a reflective aesthete', who gains sensuous joy not by seducing people but by structuring the possibility of seduction. (*Either/Or* by Kierkegaard) That means 'the becoming', the process is more important than the ultimate consequence (of seduction).

For Shankara, it is existence, consciousness and bliss, the teleos is clear; but in Kierkegaard the dread of choosing and anxiety in exercising freedom is very predominant. For him, this anxiety is two sided emotion: i) The dread burden of choosing for eternity; ii) The exhilaration of freedom in choosing oneself. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

Another potent difference between the two is for Shankara at the ultimate transcendental level nothing of this mundane world exists. Therefore he very clearly distinguishes between the two types of *mukti* (liberation), namely, *jivan-mukti* (liberation while alive) and *videha-mukti* (liberation where one realizes I am *Atman*, where name and form no more exists). The distinction is clear-cut. He says, "*Brahma satyam jagat mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah*." "*Brahman* alone is real, the world is the appearance [of *Brahman*]; and there is ultimately no difference between *Brahman* and *Atman*, individual self."⁵ Therefore for Shankara, giving up this experiential world and the illusory world is very important. But

on the other hand for Kierkegaard nowhere is the aesthetic level and the ethical level is given up, not even at the highest level, that is the religious level. Can I therefore say that Kierkegaard supersedes Shankara? This is highly debatable; as here the contexts seems to be different.

Conclusion:

For Shankara only *Brahma-vidya* will liberate; whereas for Kierkegaard 'the virtue of the absurd' and 'the leap of faith' is what is needed in his existential metaphysics. For Shankara knowledge is so very important where reason plays a pivotal role; whereas for Kierkegaard virtue of reason cannot be accepted as it leads to a paradox and therefore we have to choose faith to believe in something higher than reason. So if the parallel can be drawn between these two philosophers, the differences are distinctly pointed out. In their own way the masters remaining in their traditions transgressed gracefully the dogmatic tradition. This paper was a humble effort to draw a parallel between Shankaracharya and Kierkegaard's ontological Philosophy of 'three levels of existence/reality'. Salute to both the grand masters of the world of metaphysics.

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(Footnotes)

¹ Bhaja Govindam. Chinmaya Mission Chicago, 2014-2015.

² Miller, Connie. *Starve the Ego: Feed the Soul!* Souldrama, US, 2010. Pp. 70

³ Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. 507

⁴ Chander, Soti Shivender. *Teaching of Social Science*. Pearson Education India, 2012. Pp. 73

⁵ <http://yogananda.com.au>



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अतिभौतिकी म्हणजे विज्ञानाचा आरंभ असून विज्ञान
त्या विज्ञानाचे विकसित आणि सिद्धता प्राप्त झालेल्या
विज्ञानाची प्रस्तुती आहे. अतिभौतिकी सिद्धांतकल्पना
(Hypothesis) पुरविते तर विज्ञान त्या सिद्धांतकल्पनांची
सिद्धता ईशियायुक्त, तर्क आणि प्रायोगिक पद्धती द्वारे
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