

Philosophical Concepts Taken As Physical Religious Entities

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Philosophical discourse aimed at theorizing the origin of the cosmos or the activities therein inclusive of individual actions and the state of eternal bliss can never admit physical entities beyond the ones treated by them. Any such entities mentioned in such a discourse can only be conceptual. Limiting ourselves to South Indian philosophies Vaikuntam, feet of the Lord Vishnu and Kailasam, feet of Lord Siva are conceptual entities. Vaikuntam, Kailasam are conceptually created places of eternal bliss with the assumption that eternal bliss cannot happen in the physical cosmos. The entity of the Supreme Being beyond the cosmos, is again conceptual and the feet of Vishnu or Siva stands for the concept of the Supreme Being lording every entity other than itself so that all these entities are at the bottom of this entity which is figuratively described as being under its feet. Complete dependence on the Supreme Being is described as "admai" in Tamil and "sheShatva" in Sanskrit of which "pAratantryam" or getting possessed by the Supreme Being is one aspect. Vedas deal with only the paratva of the Supreme Being in the sens of Lording or even manifestation. Though there are aphorisms like "sarvam khalu idam brahma" which could include sheShatva this word is not brought in the Vedas. On the other hand, pada and paada meaning feet are very often alluded to particularly in the context of puruSha and Vishnu: "paado-sya vishvaabhuutaani| tadviShNo: paramam padam sadaapashyanti sooraya:|". Puranas which are religious scriptures mainly, in their attempt to expand on the Vedic conceptual ideas, being termed as upabrahmaNa's have brought in physical descriptions of Vaikunta, Kailasa etc assigning permanent servants to the Supreme Being and entry to those who are blessed with eternal bliss. They also brought in physical forms of the Supreme Being with weapons and more often distinguished the form from the human one by attributing four hands and the like. The idea of the Supreme Being occasionally or for a period was brought in by them. In other words, physical reality was introduced by the Puranas in the interest of comprehension of ideas by those who many not be able to conceptualize. As philosophy or religion is completely based on faith of an individual distinction between concept and physical entity not smudged so that it is anathema to make a distinction.

It is interesting to note that the aphorism: "tadviShNo: paramam padam sadaa pashyanti sooraya: | diveeva chakShu: aathatam | tadvipraaso vipanyavo jagruvagmsa: samindhate | viShNo: yat paramam padam |" which is invariably interpreted as a physical situation has a significant conceptual message. The physical interpretation takes "paramam padam" as the permanent abode "vaikunTham" of Vishnu. "soori" is taken to mean as "nityasoori" who are permanent residents of Vaikunta (so that Vishnu is not lonely in his abode). The physical interpretation is that these residents are looking at the Lord incessantly. In fact, the conceptual interpretation can take each word of the aphorism as significant. "paramam padam" is the feet above everything else. "viShNu" is one who has entered into the mind of the "soori". "soori" is one with "surabhaava" as defined in Bhagavad Gita (to distinguish from the devas of the "svarga") viz bereft of all ego - "ahankaara

srI:
srImathE rAmAnujAya nama:

mamakaara" (the technical suras have this), i.e. one who considers everything as the consequence of the concept of the Supreme Being. The first two sentences thus mean: "Those bereft of ego look at the feet of Vishnu the Supreme Being (who has penetrated their mind) always with their eyes (signifying mind - note "darshan" is not only seeing) constantly as if at the skies (meaning unseen). Looking at the feet needs to be interpreted conceptually as at the outset. "vipraasa:" are those with special, exalted existence; "vipanyava:" are those who have special comprehensive thinking; "jagrvamsa:" are those who are alert' "indhanam" is that which helps comprehension (more often used as the stick to burn). Thus the last two sentences mean: Those with meaningful existence, comprehension, alertness create deep understanding in that which is the feet of the Lord who penetrates into one's mind (so named Vishnu).

It is doubtless that these soori need not be in an imagined world. The Azhwars who the Vaishnavites call sooris, perhaps with less of the deep significance of the word in mind, rightly prayed for the blessing of the Supreme to be of use to their fellow beings.
