"IDEALISTIC THOUGHT IN THE BRAHMA-SŪTRA"

The Upaniṣads present the views of different philosophical thinkers and thus offer to us glimpses of early Indian thought, but not one clear-cut vedāntic thought. After that period, it was Badarāyaṇa, who interpreted and brought together the vedāntic thought in the form of aphorisms, giving it the shape of a system of philosophical thought. This work, which focuses on the main rudiments of the vedāntic thought, is known as the Brahma-sūtra.

Brahman, the Jīva and its nature, its relation to Brahman, the creation of the world, attainment of knowledge, the means of liberation and its process are the topics, which are dealt with on the basis of the Upaniṣads. Besides, the refutation of the other Indian systems viz. Sāmkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Buddhism, Jain, Śaivism and others also forms a part of the Brahma-sūtra.

About the date of the Brahma-sūtra Dasgupta writes, "It is difficult to ascertain the time when the Brahma-sūtras were written, but since they contain a refutation of almost all the other Indian systems, even of the Śūnyavāda, they cannot have been written very early. I think it may not be far from the truth in supposing that they
were written sometime in the second century B.C.¹

It becomes rather difficult to eke out the precise meaning of the sūtras without the help of commentary. Various ācāryas have commented upon them from their point of view.

Now, in view of our topic we shall try to find out whether these sūtras indicate anything that leads towards Idealism and the unreality of the world.

Prima facie, most of the sūtras seem to present the realistic view in general. In the second adhyāya, the process of creation is described.² It is stated that at first Ākāśa was created, then vāyu was created. After that, Tejas, Āp and Prthvī were created. And at the time of dissolution, they dissolve in the reverse order.

The sūtrakāra has not denied the objective reality of the world. While refuting Yogācāra buddhism (subjective Idealism) he has stated, "The non-existence (of external objects) cannot be maintained on account of perception."³

2. Br.Sū. II - 3- 1 to 15.
Furthermore, he has differentiated the waking state from the dreaming state.\(^1\) Thus, he does not seem to deny the objective reality of the world. Besides, several Śūtras of the third and the fourth adhyāyas reveal the realistic view while presenting the actual process of getting liberation. From this it appears that the śūtrakāra himself believes that bondage and liberation actually take place accordingly. In the fourth chapter of the fourth adhyāya, while describing the state of a released soul, it is stated, "In the presence (of a body the fulfilment of desire is) as in the waking state."\(^2\) This signifies that in the waking state, the body, the sense-organs, mind and the objects of enjoyment are all real. Thus Bādarāyaṇa clearly holds that there is the existence of objects of the external world, apart from their perception. In short, they can not be believed to be unreal. But at the same time they are not the Ultimate Reality, which Brahman alone is.

**Idealistic Views of the Brahma-Sūtra:**

There are a few Sūtras which assert the non-dual

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1. वैभवम्योज्य स्वप्नाविद्वित्  - Br.Sū. II.2.29.
consciousness viz. Brahman as the Ultimate Reality. And in this respect, they come close to Idealism, as Idealism believes in sentient Reality from which everything emerges.

The Brahma-sūtra admits the non-dual spiritual Reality viz. Brahman as the cause of the origination, sustentation and destruction of this universe. This manifold world emerges from Brahman, it persists in Brahman and is dissolved in Brahman. Brahman is considered to be the material as well as the efficient cause of the world. Brahman itself is the material cause from which this world is created, and it is the efficient cause also, inasmuch as it creates the world! This universe results from Brahman.

Thus the Brahma-sūtra clearly emphasizes Brahman as the Ultimate sentient Reality. But this does not mean that the phenomenal world and souls are unreal or illusory.

In the third chapter of the second adhyāya, after describing the systematic process of the creation of the five elements, the sūtrakāra turns his attention towards

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1. जन्माभिः कः
   - Br. Sū. I. 1. 2.

2. पृथिविः प्रतिज्ञापुष्टानः प्रज्ञापनीयाः
   - Br. Sū. I. 4. 23.

3. बाल्मकृत्वः परिण प्रकाश
   - योगिस्व द्विगीयिः

   - Br. Sū. I. 4. 27.
the Jīva (individual self). The question may arise as to whether like these five elements, the Jīva is created or not. The sūtrakāra declares that the Jīva is not created because the scriptures declare it to be eternal (Mātya). 1

The Jīva is a knower, i.e. sentient. It is stated that the Jīva is a part (aṁśa of the lord) on account of the statements regarding the difference of the individual soul from Brahman as also among themselves. But they are not absolutely different from Brahman. Some (recensions of the vedas) record that (Brahman) is of the nature of slaves, fishers and so on, which shows that Brahman assumes the form of the individual souls; which are non-different from Brahman. Ācāryas have interpreted this sūtra according to their own philosophical views. Śaṅkara has inserted the term 'iva' after 'aṁśa' to derive a meaning in accordance with Kevalādvaita. Rāmānjua holds that the souls are in reality parts of Brahman, in the sense that they are the qualifiers of Brahman. He upholds their reality. On

1. नात्मा यूतैनित्यतःल्यव्यत्तो तेषाः — Br. Sū. II. 3. 17
2. जीततेष्व — Br. Sū. II. 3. 18.
3. तशी स्तत्त्वाय परशुपदयो नानाप्रायुष्यमेव दाशकिक्यो दित्यधि यत्र स्वत: — Br. Sū. II. 3. 43.
the other hand, Nimbārka emphasizes that the Jīva is different as well as non-different from Brahman. The sūtrakāra also seems to hold this view later known as the svābhāvika-bhedābhedavāda (Doctrine of difference and non-difference both being natural).

Now, so far as the reality or the unreality of the Jīva is concerned, another sūtra namely, 'Abhāsa eva ca' is note worthy.¹ It would not be out of place to mention the different views of the ācāryas regarding this sūtra. Śaṅkara, while explaining this sūtra, interprets the word 'Abhāsa' as signifying 'unreality' and presents the analogy of the reflection. The reflection of the sun in one vessel of water may be moving as the water is moving. But the actual sun remains unaffected. The reflection of the sun in other vessels full of water also does not move. So the sun appearing on the water is just an appearance and not the real one.² Similarly, Brahman is not affected by the seeming affliction of the individual soul, nor is one soul affected by the happiness or misery of another. On the other


2. This has led some later thinkers to say that Śaṅkara recognised the Pratibimbavāda.
hand, Bhāskara, negates the view of Śaṅkara and criticises it. Rāmānuja interprets the word 'Ābhāsa' as hetvābhāsa. Vallabha does not take the Jīva as unreal and emphasizes that the Jīva is known as 'Ābhāsa' of Brahman so far as its virtue of Bliss is supressed.

We can only state here that whatever the interpretation of this sutra be, its main concern seems to be to show that Brahman is the only reality and everything else apart from it is just an appearance. As E.A. Solomon states, "The intention is to show that Brahman is the Ultimate Reality and everything else visualised apart from it, is merely an appearance."¹

We can not get a clear idea as to what was in the mind of the sūtrakāra as the acāryas have tried to interpret the sutra according to their point of view. But the sūtrakāra does not seem to propound the unreality of the Jīvas (individual souls).

In the third adhyāya, there are sutras about the dreaming state. The first sutra seems to present the view of Pūrvapakṣa, "In the intermediate state there is

creation, because the śrutī says so."\(^1\) But in answer to this it is stated, "But (the dream world) is a mere illusion, on account of its nature not being manifest in its totality."\(^2\) Here, for the first time the word 'Māyā' is used. According to the sūtrakāra, the dream world is merely Māyā, an appearance only. It would be essential to state that even though the word 'Māyā' is used, it only indicates illusory character of the things of the dreaming state and not the unreality of the external world, that is experienced during the waking state. It may be mentioned that Rāmānuja even here explains the word 'Māyā' as signifying extraordinary power and its creation.

We may conclude that in the Brahma-sūtra, we do not find any hint that could lead us towards a view, which regards the external world as unreal. The Sūtrakāra has not stated a word against the objective reality of the phenomenal world. So he does not seem to be in favour of its unreality. Since the concept of the unreality of the external world is a later development, which took place under the spell of the full-fledged Yogācāra Idealism, naturally it is not found in the Brahma-sūtra.  

\(^1\) ईच्छे पुष्टितः हि  
\(^2\) पायो मात्र तु काल्पनिकानमिथ्यवत्स्कस्वप्फल्वात्  
- Br. Sū. III. 2. 1.  
- Br. Sū. III. 2. 3.