Assaying the Belief in Divine Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity

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Abstract:
One of the doctrines shared by Hinduism and Christianity is the doctrine of incarnation and bodily fall of divinity, which on surface sounds to have been understood by both schools in the same terms. Since both schools insist on transcendent unity of God in his essence; for example in Upanishads which is one of the key scriptures of Hinduism it is insisted that the origin of existence is a transcendent, invisible and unfathomable God called Brahman which is the highest the most excellent and beyond description. By the same token, in Christianity God has always been envisaged as a unique and transcendent being. Nevertheless, these two religions believe that transcendent God gets incarnated in some conditions. Thus some have paired these two schools in their belief in incarnation without understanding the nuances. By more probing into their respective theologies, however, we find out that not only their notions of incarnation differ but there are also fundamental differences in their understandings of God in general and divine transcendent unity and synthesizing it with divine fall and incarnation. In Hinduism God is conceived as an absolute being which manifests itself in three attributes. But in Christianity God is not an absolute and simple essence rather it is envisaged as a compound entity spread through trinity figures who have been interacting since the time immemorial. Moreover, these two schools have two different positions on the necessity and cause of incarnation. Thus one can conclude that the doctrine of incarnation is understood in Hinduism and Christianity in radically different fashions.

In Christianity Jesus represents the only incarnation of divinity as the son of God who is one of triple hypostases building trinity and the belief in whom is the path of human salvation. Thus conceived, God has descended into the body of Christ as the ransom of original sin. Then incarnation in Christianity is founded upon two other doctrines, i.e. original sin and ransom. But in Hinduism incarnation is not built on such doctrines. On the other hand, the second manifestation of transcendent Brahman which stands for divine lordship, i.e. Vishnu, has ten incarnations which range from animal forms to that of human one according to Hindu myths. These incarnations comprise fish, turtle, swine, elfin, Rama with axe, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and apocalypse savoir called Kalki. Among these incarnations, the first five ones are mythical the second four ones are historical figures and the last one has not yet come to the light. These incarnations are meant to expand faith and overcome evil insofar as in Bhagawad Gita, Krishna describes her own incarnation to one of her disciples called Arjuna in the following words: "the unborn being, my soul is immortal. O’ Arjuna, as the creator of all creatures, I get born with the power of my soul, when faith gets blurred by unfaith I make myself incarnated to rise for promotion of goods and overcoming evils. Every time I get incarnated differently". Against Paul’s teachings in Christianity the incarnation of divinity is supposed to be a ransom for original sin not a
matter of following the revealed law. As Paul admonishes the Galatians for following Torah: "ignorant Galatians! are you conjured by some one? Let me ask you a question. Could you receive clean spirit of God by maintaining Torah? Of course not. How could you think that you can be more spiritual when you have achieved nothing by maintaining Torah? All the people who rely on following Torah are accursed..." (Galatians, 3: 1). Moreover, in Hinduism loving and worshiping these incarnations are considered a path to salvation. There are also other ways to tread like the paths of practice, knowledge and reason. While in Christianity the belief in Christ as the only incarnation of divinity is the only path to salvation.

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