

The Omnipresence of Brahman-God in Indian and Western Thought

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Spaceless, timeless, and unchanging *Nirguna Brahma* is omnipresent as the foundational ground of existence. Remove *Nirguna Brahma* and all existence immediately ceases to be. From the non-dualistic standpoint, Shankara described Brahman as all-pervading, omnipresent (*Sarvagata, Vibhu*), boundless without an end, and not confined to a single locality. It is the seer of sight, the thinker of thought and the knower of knowledge. This is confirmed by the religious scriptures that tell us, ‘He is omnipresent like space and eternal’ and ‘This one is eternal, omnipresent, steady and unchanging’ (*Bhagavad Gitā* 2:24). In view of the fact that Brahman is infinite, there is nothing outside of It. Brahman is the substratum of space, the ground of existence. All things are rooted in Brahman while It is rooted in-Itself. Finite things are contingent having only a dependent and participating existence, which they receive from Brahman, the omnipresent substrative cause of the universe.¹

Vivekananda indicates that *Nirguna Brahma* is ‘omnipresent, because He has no form. That which has no form or shape that which is not limited by space or time, cannot live in a certain place. How can it? It is everywhere, omnipresent, equally present through all of us.’² ‘Form is confined to time and space and is bound by the law of

causation. All time is in us, we are not in time. As the Soul [Ātman] is not in time and space, all time and space are within the Soul. The Soul is therefore omnipresent.’³ ‘This glass is limited; it is not omnipresent, because the surrounding matter forces it to take that form, does not allow it to expand. It is conditioned by everything around it and is therefore, limited. But that which is beyond law, where there is nothing to act upon It, how can It be limited? It must be omnipresent.’⁴ One infinite omnipresent Brahman-God transcends the law of causality and is not limited by any constraining external forces. He is not restricted by space, time, and causality or by name and form, and is thus, infinite and omnipresent.

Concerning *Saguna Brahma* (Personal God) the Divine attribute of omnipresence is the property of being present in every location in heaven and in the universe concurrently at the same time, yet being contained in none. Qualified non-dualists hold that Brahman-God is everywhere so that we and the laws of nature are a fragment of Brahman-God. Vivekananda explains omnipresence this way, ‘The whole universe comprising all nature, and an infinite number of souls, is, as it were, the infinite body of God. He is interpenetrating the whole of it.’⁵ ‘The whole world is a body, and behind that is the universal mind, and

behind that is the universal Soul. Just as this body is a portion of the universal body, so this mind is a portion of the universal mind, and the soul of man a portion of the universal Soul.⁶ ‘The Personal God is only the sum total of all, and yet It is an individual by Itself, just as you are the individual body of which each cell is an individual part itself.’⁷ This is omnipresence in the total and most unlimited sense since the universe is the infinite body of God.

A more moderate form is the doctrine of Panentheism (all-in-God) according to which the universe is contained within Brahman-God, and that It is within all things (Theopanism (God-in-all)).⁸ This coinherence is possible because It is omnipresent. Referring to Brahman-God as ‘It,’ means that It combines He, She, and non-personal aspects. Maximum external omnipresence indicates that all things reside within Brahman-God. Maximum internal (immanent) omnipresence means that Brahman-God resides in all things. An infinite Brahman-God without limits is omnipresent: being external and internal (immanent) pervading the phenomenal world, and existing beyond its limits (transcendent). It pervades all objects outside of us including space, which makes It external to us, just as another person’s mind pervades their body, yet is external to us.

As Swami Vivekananda states, ‘The God of the Qualified non-dualists is also a Personal God, the repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities, only He is interpenetrating everything in the universe. He is immanent in everything and everywhere; and when the scriptures say that God is everything, it means that God is interpenetrating everything, not that God has become the wall, but that God is in the wall.

There is not a particle, not an atom in the universe where He is not.’⁹ ‘He is near and He is far. He is inside everything. He is outside everything, interpenetrating everything.’ ‘Therefore there is a metaphysical necessity ... one Soul which covers and interpenetrates all the infinite number of souls in the world, in and through which they live, in and through which they sympathize, and love, and work for one another. And this universal Soul is Paramātman, the Lord God of the universe.’ ‘This highest Energy-Love-Beauty is a person, an individual, the Infinite Mother of this universe—the God of gods—the Lord of lords, omnipresent yet separate from the universe—the Soul of souls, yet separate from every soul.’¹⁰

Swami Abhedananda emphasized, ‘If we say that matter exists separate from and outside of God, we have made Him limited by matter, we have made Him finite and perishable . . . if He is infinite and one, our bodies and everything in the universe from the minutest atom to the largest planetary system, from the lowest animalcule to the highest Being, exist in and through that Infinite Existence. . . . The whole universe is in God and God is in it; it is inseparable from God. I am in Him and He is in me . . . this infinite Being pervades the universe and interpenetrates every particle of matter, giving existence to everything.’ ‘Our body is a part of God’s body, our mind is a part of the Divine or Universal Mind, our will is a part of the Universal or Cosmic Will.’¹¹ God is the ‘Supreme Lord of the universe, who dwells in all beings and who is the life and soul of all animate and inanimate objects of the world.... He is the one stupendous whole of which the manifested phenomena are but parts. The gross material universe is His physical body. He sees through all eyes,

hears through all ears, eats through all mouths, feels through all hearts, thinks through all minds, and reasons through all intellects.¹² ‘God is not merely the Ruler of the universe standing outside of nature, but He dwells in nature. He is immanent and resident in nature. He is not only, therefore, extra-cosmic, but also intra-cosmic. He is the internal Ruler of the universe. His creation is constantly manifesting His powers. The physical body of this Being is the gross material universe. . . . His mind is the sum total of all the individual minds, and, therefore, it can be said that there is one ocean of mind or mental force which pervades the universe, and that is neither yours, nor mine, but belongs to God.’¹³

In the west Stephen Charnock (1628-80), the British Puritan Presbyterian clergyman, put it, ‘God preserves all, and therefore is in all. . . . He works in everything, everything lives and works in Him; therefore He is present with all, or rather if things live, they are in God, who gives them life. If things live, God is in them, and gives them life; if things move, God is in and gives them motion; if things have any being, God is in and gives them being; if God withdraws Himself, they presently lose their being.’¹⁴

The idea of omnipresence or immanence emphasizes the nearness of Brahman-God. Meditators are told to think of themselves as being bathed in the bliss of Brahman-God. Since Brahman-God is omnipresent, It is within us and that constitutes the immanent divinity at the root and ground of our being. From a practical standpoint, omnipresence means *since Brahman-God is present everywhere, we can make contact with the Lord from any location, and at any time under all circumstances no matter where we are.* As we lead our daily lives the gracious

omnipresence of Brahman-God is a source of strength and comfort and conviction for us.¹⁵

Brahman-God, not being a physical object, is not contained in any location. Augustine (354-430), the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa who also lived in Rome, made the point that God ‘knows how to be wholly everywhere without being confined to any place.’ God is *wholly present* wherever He is. Moreover, God is not *contained* in or confined by any of the places at which He exists. ‘Although in speaking of Him we say that God is everywhere present, we must resist carnal ideas and withdraw our mind from our bodily senses, and not imagine that God is distributed through all things by a sort of extension of size, as earth or water or air or light are distributed.’¹⁶

The Lutheran theologian Abraham Calov (1612-86) mentioned that God ‘comprehends all places, not as one who is contained and circumscribed, but as the One who contains all things, according to a presence which is illocal and not local. This is what the scholars meant when they said: God is everywhere and God is nowhere—everywhere inasmuch as His presence comprehends all things, nowhere inasmuch as He is enclosed in nothing. . . . It is not possible for Him not to be present everywhere.’¹⁷

The American Baptist Augustus Strong (1836-1921) noted that, ‘God’s nature is without extension; is subject to no limitations of space; and contains in Itself the cause of space. . . . God is not in space and therefore not subject to the laws of space. . . . God in the totality of His Essence, without diffusion or expansion, multiplication or division, penetrates and fills the universe in all its parts. . . . God’s omnipresence is not the presence of a part

but the whole of God in every place. This follows from the conception of God as incorporeal. . . . God is immanent in the universe, not by compulsion, but by the free act of His own will.¹⁸

Most religious philosophers believe that Brahman-God pervades the universe but is not fully identified with defiled objects. For example, when a light is present throughout a room, it remains separate from the objects that are there. Brahman-God remains distinct as a cause from Its effect. That Brahman-God is present at every point in the universe, but Its manifestation is greater in, for example, a human being than in a rock. For example, the power of the Lord is more actively, sacredly, and mystically manifested in a great soul, in a holy place, and in a religious ceremony. By analogy, it is like light being present to a greater degree near the sun than in a dim room.¹⁹

Different manifestations of Divine power

Sri Ramakrishna supports omnipresence when stating, ‘One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere.’ ‘. . . but on attaining Perfect Knowledge he sees only one Consciousness everywhere. The same Perfect Knowledge, again, makes him realize that the one Consciousness has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. It is He, undoubtedly, who has become everything; but in some cases there is a greater manifestation than in others.’ ‘God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His Power. . . .’ ‘What is knowledge and what is ignorance? A man is ignorant so long as he feels that God is far away. He has knowledge when he

knows that God is here and everywhere.’²⁰

Under the rubric ‘Degrees of Reflection’ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan upheld the idea that, ‘The different kinds of being are higher and lower manifestations of the one Absolute Spirit. . . . While the Absolute is in all finite things and permeates them, the things *differ in the degree of their permeability, in the fullness of their reflections*. . . . The rank of the categories as higher and lower is determined by the adequacy of their expression of reality. Life is a higher category than matter.’ All existence is a revelation or reflection of the omnipresent higher reality in varying degrees.²¹

The omnipresent God’s varying manifestations is discussed by the Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). He says,

The soul is present in the entire body and in all of its several parts, yet in a different manner in each of these parts: it does not dwell in the mind in the same manner as in the heart, neither is it present in the hand in the same manner as in the foot. . . . God’s immanence is not an unconscious emanence [sic], but a conscious presence of His being in all His creatures. That is the reason why the nature of this Divine presence varies in accordance with the nature of these creatures. To be sure, even the most insignificant creature owes its origin and preservation to God’s power, to His being: God dwells in every creature; but this does not mean that He dwells equally in every creature. All things are indeed ‘in Him’ but all things are not ‘with Him.’ God does not dwell on earth as He dwells in heaven, in animals as in man, in the inorganic as in the organic creation, in the wicked as in the pious, in the church as in Christ. Creatures differ according to the different manner in which God dwells in them. A creature’s nature and essence is determined by its

relation to God. Hence, though all creatures reveal God, they do so in different ways and along different lines.²²

Omnipresence in relation to omnipotence and omniscience

Traditionally more attention has been placed on Divine omnipotence and omniscience, yet it follows that Brahman-God possesses these two attributes because It is omnipresent. Being omnipresent in all location allows Brahman-God to know everything that is occurring (omniscience) and to act everywhere with direct control over every part of the universe (omnipotence). There is no place to which Brahman-God’s knowledge and power do not extend. One caveat, there are action and knowledge at a distance. For example, in the modern technological world one can shoot a missile that has long-distance powerful effects, or with a large telescope can have knowledge of a far-off planet without being there.

Following this line of thinking, the Italian Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) reasoned that according to His Essence, God’s dimensions are infinite and not limited by matter or form, or by anything outside of Himself. Since God is undivided and of infinite power, His entire being is everywhere and He cannot be circumscribed.²³ ‘God moves all things to their operations, as we have shown. Therefore, He is in all things. . . . An incorporeal thing is related to its presence in something by its power, in the same way that a corporeal thing is related to its presence in something by dimensive quantity. Now, if there were any body possessed of infinite dimensive quantity, it would have to be everywhere. So, if there is an incorporeal

being possessed of infinite power, it must be everywhere. . . . God is the universal cause of the whole of being ... wherever being is found, the Divine presence is also there. . . . God is immediately present, not only in the celestial body, but also in the lowest things. But we must not think that God is everywhere in such a way that He is divided in various areas of place, as if one part of Him were here and another part there. Rather, His entire being is everywhere.’ ‘God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power. He is by His presence in all things, inasmuch as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His Essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being.’²⁴

The German Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) stressed, ‘The almighty power of God . . . must be essentially present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf. The reason is this: It is God who creates, effects, and preserves all things through His almighty power. . . . He must be present and must make and preserve His creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects.’ ‘God in His Essence is present everywhere . . . but is at the same time beyond and above the whole creation.’ As the efficient cause, God is ‘completely and entirely present in every single body.’ God’s ‘Divine nature can be wholly and entirely in all creatures and in every single individual being, more deeply, more inwardly, more present than the creature is to itself, and yet on the other hand may and can be circumscribed nowhere.’²⁵ Omnipresence is necessary for God to continually create and preserve all things, every moment with His almighty power.²⁶

Post-Reformation Lutheran theologians like Johann Gerhard (1582-1637)

emphasized that, ‘God is present not only according to His power and efficacy, not only by His seeing and knowing all things; but also His total and undivided Essence is present to all things. For not only His power and knowledge are immense and infinite, but His Essence as well.’²⁷

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, ‘Omnipresence is an attribute of God, the infinite and first cause of all, who is actually present in all existing places and things. This presence is not to be interpreted as dimensional or spatial, since God is utterly simple and infinite and thus free of all spatial limitations. Rather He is present as an agent to His effects. So God is everywhere, for He is the source of the being and action in all places and things. Moreover, since in God power and action are one, He is substantially present in all existing things through His power and operation.’²⁸

Religion and science

In the moment-to-moment continuous creation, omnipresent Brahman-God operates at every level simultaneously affecting all entities, structures, and processes. Therefore the ‘causal joint’ of Divine action between Brahman-God and the world is everywhere, both internally from inside and externally from outside. Brahman-God works through complex higher-level systems that acts on lower-level systems (downward causation) and vice versa (upward causation), employing a transfer of energy and a flow of active information. Divine action being omnipresent operates through the laws and regularities of nature on the various interconnected and interdependent component systems, cosmological,

biological, physical, and quantum.²⁹ Brahman-God’s action works directly and immediately through a causal chain of secondary causes, which constitute the laws of nature that are studied by the physical, social, and behavioural scientists.

In a finite world ‘omni’ (signifying ‘all’) means Brahman-God is present everywhere and has all power and knowledge, yet these three would be of a limited magnitude. Only in an infinite world could presence, knowledge, and power be unlimited. For example, according to Albert Einstein (1879-1955) our space-time continuum is of a limited size, and thus if Brahman-God is everywhere then that omnipresence is finite.

Brahman-God perceives, knows, and empowers everything immediately and directly being omnipresent. Therefore, Brahman-God is causally present everywhere at the same time, at both the macro and micro quantum world as well. Not located only at a single point in space and time, It has instant access to every event. Since Brahman-God is spatially and temporally omnipresent even in the quantum world, Divine actions are local, and not non-local as specified by quantum physics. Brahman-God is already in all locations and certainly not limited by the speed of light as material objects are. Brahman-God operates on the events of the quantum world from the deepest ontological foundational level, apart from the five senses that quantum physicists are not able to grasp. Only at a later stage do we have non-local correlations.

Our perception operates in a specific vibrational range. Outside of that range there are other worlds that exist in this location. As Vivekananda stated, ‘Suppose I develop an electric sense—all will change. Suppose my senses grow finer—you will all appear

changed. If I change, you change. If I go beyond the power of the senses, you will appear as spirit and God.³⁰ Brahman-God is omnipresent at each one of these vibrational levels. We can think of the various vibrational levels as the fourth spatial dimension, since when they change our perception of spatial objects is altered.

Luco Johan van den Brom from the Netherlands explained God's transcendence this way, 'God, by existing in a higher dimensional system, is also present in the places of all the objects in the three-dimensional space of created cosmos without being contained by that three-dimensional space.' 'Three-dimensional space is included in the higher dimensional one.' Similarly, a three-dimensional cube transcends a two-dimensional surface which is present within the cube. Existing in a higher-dimensional system, God's space contains our three-dimensional space without being contained by it. Our space does not bisect His. Three-dimensional limitations do not apply to God's higher dimensional existence.³¹

Omnipresent Brahman-God is not bound by place or limited to a specific time. Being a unity, Brahman-God is present as a whole, in Its entirety, at every spatial and temporal region (spatial and temporal omnipresence) including each individual person, and in every concept and idea (conceptual omnipresence). In Its entirety, Brahman-God is everywhere, and everywhen meaning there is no instance of time from which It is absent. From this standpoint, it is not the case that one temporal part or stage of God is present at one moment of time and not at another as we are. Being temporally omnipresent, Brahman-God has direct experience of the past and is in no needs of

memory that works indirectly. In his Patanjali commentary Vivekananda wrote, 'The past and future, though not existing in a manifested form, yet exist in a fine form.'³² The omnipresent Brahman-God also exists in the realm of fine form and therefore has perfect understanding of what for us is a future event. We might think of a movie screen that shows only the present activity, while all past and future events are on the film in the projector.

There is the 'Theory of the Block Universe,' held in a non-religious way by some scientists and philosophers that rejects the flow of time concept believing that past, present and future events exist concurrently. Another way of looking at it is that the entire past, present, and future exist within the omniscient Brahman-God, but that the Divine Being is manifesting in the phenomenal universe only in the present (that differs from one location to another) at this very moment. Brahman-God knows future events because they are part of Its nature, not from the standpoint of the phenomenal world where they have not yet materialized. According to Augustine and Aquinas, God is outside of time viewing the entire temporal sequence all at once. In which case all events are equally contemporaneous.

Being conceptually omnipresent, Brahman-God is present in mental space, with knowledge that is direct and complete without any need of inferential reason that leads the mind from one concept to another. It is present in every phase of human life including the mental, physical, and emotional; in every aspect of nature, at every level of causality, in all ideas and theories, and temporally in every moment and event of history. ■

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- 5 *CW*, I, p. 401.
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