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ADVAITA VEDĀNTA SYSTEM IN THE LIGHT OF ŚĀṅKARĀCĀRYA: A STUDY

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Abstract: The Advaita Vedānta system arises out of the Upaniṣads which mark the end result of the sacred text speculation and are suitably referred to as the Vedānta or the top of the Vedas. As we've got seen previously, it develops through the Upaniṣads during which its basic truths are 1st grasped, the Brahma-Sūtra of Bādarāyaṇa which systematizes the Upaniṣadic teachings, and therefore the commentaries written on the Upaniṣadic teachings, and the commentaries written on these sūtras by several consequent writers among whom Śāṅkarācārya and Rāmānuja are well known. of all the systems, the Vedānta, particularly as taken by Śāṅkarācārya, has exerted the best influence on Indian life and it persists in some kind or alternative in numerous elements of India.

Keywords: Vedānta, Advaita Vedānta, Brahman, Ātman, Jīva, Jagat, Māyā

INTRODUCTION

Vedānta means " the end of the Vedas". Primarily the word stood for the Upaniṣad though afterwards, its denotation widened to include all thoughts developed out of the Upaniṣads . " Upaniṣad" means what destroys ignorance and gets man near to God or 'what gets man near to the teacher (upa-ni-sad). The Upaniṣads were regarded as the inner or secret meanings(*rahasya*) of the Vedas, hence their teachings were sometimes called Vedopaniṣad or the mystery of the Vedas.¹ To quote Dr S. Radhakrishnan: " It is impossible to read Shāririka's writings packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality...His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after.. whether we agree or differ, the penetrating light of his mind never leaves us where we were".²

Advaita Vedānta is one version of Vedānta. Vedānta is nominally a school of Indian philosophy, although, in reality, it is a label for any hermeneutics that attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads or, more formally, the canonical summary of the Upaniṣads, Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtra. Advaita is often translated as "non-dualism" though it means "non-secondness." Although Śaṅkara is regarded as the promoter of Advaita Vedānta as a distinct school of Indian philosophy, the origins of this school predate Śaṅkara. The existence of an Advaita tradition is acknowledged by Śaṅkara in his commentaries. The names of Upaniṣadic teachers such as Yajñavalkya, Uddalaka, and Bādarāyaṇa, the author of the Brahma Sūtra, could be considered as representing the thoughts of early Advaita.³ The essential philosophy of Advaita is an idealist monism, and is considered to be presented first in the Upaniṣads and consolidated in the Brahma Sūtra by this tradition. According to Advaita metaphysics, Brahman—the ultimate, transcendent and immanent God of the latter Vedas—appears as the world because of its creative energy (*māyā*). The world has no separate existence apart from Brahman. The experiencing self (*jīva*) and the transcendental self of the Universe (*ātman*) are in reality identical (both are Brahman), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such. These cardinal doctrines are represented in the anonymous verse "*Brahma Satyam Jagan mithya; jīvo brahmaiva na aparah*" (Brahman is alone True, and this world of plurality is an error; the individual self is not different from Brahman). Plurality is experienced because of error in judgments (*mithyā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*). Knowledge of Brahman removes these errors and causes liberation from the cycle of transmigration and worldly bondage.⁴

History of Advaita Vedānta

It is possible that an Advaita tradition existed in the early part of the first millennium C.E., as indicated by Śaṅkara himself with his reference to tradition (*sampradāya*). But the only two names that could have some historical certainty are Gaudapāda and Govinda Bhagavadpāda, mentioned as Śaṅkara's teacher's teacher and the latter Śaṅkara's teacher. The first complete Advaitic work is considered to be the Māndukya Kārikā, a commentary on the Māndukya Upaniṣad, authored by Gaudapāda. Śaṅkara, as many scholars believe, lived in the eight century. His life, travel, and works, as we understand from the Digvijaya texts are almost of a superhuman quality. Though he lived only for 32 years, Śaṅkara's accomplishments included traveling from the south to the north of India, writing commentaries for the ten Upaniṣads, the cryptic Brahma Sūtra, the Bhagavad Gītā, and authoring many other texts (though his authorship of only some is established), and founding four pīṭhas, or centers of (Advaitic) excellence, with his pupils in charge. Śaṅkara is supposed to have had four (prominent) pupils: Padmapāda, Sureśvara, Hastamalaka and Toṭaka. Padmapāda is said to be his earliest student. *Pañcapādikā*, by Padmapāda, is a lucid commentary on Śaṅkara's commentary on the first verses of the Brahma Sūtra. Sureśvara is supposed to have written *Naiṣkarmya Siddhi*, an independent treatise on Advaita. Mandana Miśra (eight century), an earlier adherent of the rival school of Bhatta Mīmāṃsā, is responsible for a version of Advaita which focuses on the doctrine of *sphota*, a semantic theory held by the Indian philosopher of language Bhartrhari. He also accepts to a greater extent the joint importance of knowledge and works as a means to liberation, when for Śaṅkara knowledge is the one and only means. Mandana Miśra's *Brahmasiddhi* is a significant work, which also marks a distinct form of Advaita. Two major sub-schools of Advaita Vedānta arose after Śaṅkara: Bhamati and Vivarana. The Bhamati School owes its name to Vacaspati Miśra's (ninth century) commentary on Śaṅkara's Brahma –Sūtra-Bhāṣya, while the Vivarana School is named after Prakashtman's

(tenth century) commentary on Padmapāda's *Pañcapādikā*, which itself is a commentary on Śaṅkara's commentary on the Brahma Sūtra. The prominent names in the later Advaita tradition are Prakāśātman (tenth century), Vimuktātman (tenth century), Sarvajñātman (tenth century), Śrī Harṣa (twelfth century), Citsukha (twelfth century), ānandagiri (thirteenth century), Amalānandā (thirteenth century), Vidyāraṇya (fourteenth century), Śaṅkarānandā (fourteenth century), Sadānandā (fifteenth century), Prakāśānanda (sixteenth century), Nṛsiṃhāśrama (sixteenth century), Madhusūdhana Sarasvatī (seventeenth century), Dharmarāja Advarindra (seventeenth century), Appaya Dīkṣita (seventeenth century), Sadaśiva Brahmendra (eighteenth century), Candrasekhara Bhārati (twentieth century), and Sacchidānandendra Sarasvatī (twentieth century). Vivarana, which is a commentary on Padmapāda's *Pañcapādikā*, written by Vācaspati Mīśra is a landmark work in the tradition. The *Khandanakhandakhādyā* of Śrī Harṣa, *Tattvapradīpikā* of Citsukha, *Pañcadasi* of Vidyāraṇya, *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānandā, *Advaitasiddhi* of Madhusadana Sarasvatī, and *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* of Dharmarāja Advarindra are some of the landmark works representing later Advaita tradition. Throughout the eighteenth century and until the twenty-first century, there are many saints and philosophers whose tradition is rooted primarily or largely in Advaita philosophy. Prominent among the saints are Bhagavan Ramana Maharṣi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Tapovanam, Swami Chinmayānandā, and Swami Bodhānandā. Among the philosophers, KC Bhattacharya and TMP Mahadevan have contributed a great deal to the tradition. 5

Metaphysics and Philosophy

The classical Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara recognizes a unity in multiplicity, identity between individual and pure consciousness, and the experienced world as having no existence apart from Brahman. The major metaphysical concepts in Advaita Vedānta tradition, such as *māyā*, *mithyā* (error in judgment), *vivarta* (illusion/whirlpool), have been subjected to a variety of interpretations. On some interpretations, Advaita Vedānta appears as a nihilistic philosophy that denounces the matters of the lived-world.

Brahman, Jīva, īśvara, and Māyā

For classical Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is the fundamental reality underlying all objects and experiences. Brahman is explained as pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss. All forms of existence presuppose a knowing self. Brahman or pure consciousness underlies the knowing self. Consciousness according to the Advaita School, unlike the positions held by other Vedānta schools, is not a property of Brahman but its very nature. Brahman is also one without a second, all-pervading and the immediate awareness. This absolute Brahman is known as *nirguṇa* Brahman, or Brahman “without qualities,” but is usually simply called “Brahman.” This Brahman is ever known to Itself and constitutes the reality in all individuals selves, while the appearance of our empirical individuality is credited to *avidyā* (ignorance) and *māyā* (illusion). Brahman thus cannot be known as an individual object distinct from the individual self. However, it can be experienced indirectly in the natural world of experience as a personal God, known as *saguṇa* Brahman, or Brahman with qualities. It is usually referred to as *īśvara* (the Lord). The appearance of plurality arises from a natural state of confusion or ignorance (*avidyā*), inherent in most biological entities. Given this natural state of ignorance, Advaita provisionally accepts the empirical reality of individual selves, mental ideas and

physical objects as a cognitive construction of this natural state of ignorance. But from the absolute standpoint, none of these have independent existence but are founded on Brahman. From the standpoint of this fundamental reality, individual minds as well as physical objects are appearances and do not have abiding reality. Brahman appears as the manifold objects of experience because of its creative power, *māyā*. *Māyā* is that which appears to be real at the time of experience but which does not have ultimate existence. It is dependent on pure consciousness. Brahman appears as the manifold world without undergoing an intrinsic change or modification. At no point of time does Brahman change into the world. The world is but *avivarta*, a superimposition on Brahman. The world is neither totally real nor totally unreal. It is not totally unreal since it is experienced. It is not totally real since it is sublated by knowledge of Brahman. There are many examples given to illustrate the relation between the existence of the world and Brahman. The two famous examples are that of the space in a pot versus the space in the whole cosmos (undifferentiated in reality, though arbitrarily separated by the contingencies of the pot just as the world is in relation to Brahman), and the self versus the reflection of the self (the reflection having no substantial existence apart from the self just as the objects of the world rely upon Brahman for substantiality). The existence of an individuated *jīva* and the world are without a beginning. We cannot say when they began, or what the first cause is. But both are with an end, which is knowledge of Brahman. According to classical Advaita Vedānta, the existence of the empirical world cannot be conceived without a creator who is all-knowing and all-powerful. The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world are overseen by *Īśvara*. *Īśvara* is the purest manifestation of Brahman. Brahman with the creative power of *māyā* is *Īśvara*. *Māyā* has both individual (*vyāsti*) and cosmic (*samaṣṭi*) aspects. The cosmic aspect belongs to one *Īśvara*, and the individual aspect, *avidyā*, belongs to many *jīvas*. But the difference is that *Īśvara* is not controlled by *māyā*, whereas the *jīva* is overpowered by *avidyā*. *Māyā* is responsible for the creation of the world. *Avidyā* is responsible for confounding the distinct existence between self and the not-self. With this confounding, *avidyā* conceals Brahman and constructs the world. As a result the *jīva* functions as a doer (*kartā*) and enjoyer (*bhoktā*) of a limited world. ⁶ The classical picture may be contrasted with two sub-schools of Advaita Vedānta that arose after Śaṅkara: Bhāmati and Vivaraṇa. The primary difference between these two sub-schools is based on the different interpretations for *avidyā* and *māyā*. Śaṅkara described *avidyā* as beginningless. He considered that to search the origin of *avidyā* itself is a process founded on *avidyā* and hence will be fruitless. But Śaṅkara's disciples gave greater attention to this concept, and thus originated the two sub-schools. The Bhāmati School owes its name to Vācaspati Miśra's (ninth century) commentary on Śaṅkara's Brahma -Sūtra -Bhāṣya, while the Vivaraṇa School is named after Prakāśātman's (tenth century) commentary on Padmapāda's *Pañcapādikā*, which itself is a commentary on Śaṅkara's Brahma-Sūtra -Bhāṣya. The major issue that distinguishes Bhāmati and Vivaraṇa schools is their position on the nature and locus of *avidyā*. According to the Bhāmati School, the *jīva* is the locus and object of *avidyā*. According to the Vivaraṇa School, Brahman is the locus of *avidyā*. The Bhāmati School holds that Brahman can never be the locus of *avidyā* but is the controller of it as *Īśvara*. Belonging to *jīva*, *Tulāvidyā*, or individual ignorance performs two functions – veils Brahman, and projects (*vikṣepa*) a separate world. *Mulāvidyā* (“root ignorance”) is the universal ignorance that is equivalent to *Māyā*, and is controlled by *Īśvara*. The Vivaraṇa School holds that since Brahman alone exists, Brahman is the locus and object of *avidyā*. With the help of epistemological discussions, the non-reality of the duality between Brahman and world is established. The Vivaraṇa School responds to the question regarding Brahman's existence as both “pure consciousness” and “universal ignorance” by claiming that valid cognition (*pramā*) presumes *avidyā*, in the everyday world, whereas pure consciousness is the essential nature of Brahman. ⁷

Three Planes of Existence

There are three planes of existence according to classical Advaita Vedānta: the plane of absolute existence (*pāramārthika sattā*), the plane of worldly existence (*vyāvahārika sattā*) which includes this world and the heavenly world, and the plane of illusory existence (*pratibhāsika sattā*). The two latter planes of existence are a function of *māyā* and are thus illusory to some extent. A *Pratibhāsika* existence, such as objects presented in a mirage, is less real than a worldly existence. Its corresponding unreality is, however, different from that which characterizes the absolutely nonexistent or the impossible, such as a sky-lotus (a lotus that grows in the sky) or the son of a barren woman. The independent existence of a mirage and the world, both of which are due to a certain causal condition, ceases once the causal condition change. The causal condition is *avidyā*, or ignorance. The independent existence and experience of the world ceases to be with the gain of knowledge of Brahman. The nature of knowledge of Brahman is that “I am pure consciousness.” The self-ignorance of the *jīva* (individuated self) that “I am limited” is replaced by the Brahman-knowledge that “I am everything,” accompanied by a re-identification of the self with the transcendental Brahman. The knower of Brahman sees the one non-plural reality in everything. He or she no longer gives an absolute reality to independent and limited existence of the world, but experiences the world as a creative expression of pure consciousness. The states of waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*) and deep sleep (*susupti*) all point to the fourth nameless state *tūriya*, pure consciousness, which is to be realized as the true self. Pure consciousness is not only pure existence but also the ultimate bliss which is experienced partially during deep sleep. Hence we wake up refreshed.

Epistemology

The Advaita tradition puts forward three lesser tests of truth: correspondence, coherence, and practical efficacy. These are followed by a fourth test of truth: epistemic-nonsublatability (*abādhyatvam orbādharāhityam*). consistent with the Vedānta Paribhāṣā (a classical text of Advaita Vedānta) “that knowledge is valid which has for its object something that's nonsublated.” Nonsublatability is taken into account because the ultimate criterion for valid knowledge. The master test of epistemic-nonsublatability inspires an extra constraint: foundationality (*anadhigatatvam*, lit. “of not known earlier”).⁸ This last criterion of truth is that the highest standard that virtually all knowledge claims fail, and thus it's the quality for absolute, or unqualified, knowledge, while the previous criteria are amenable to mundane, worldly knowledge claims. consistent with Advaita Vedānta, a judgment is true if it remains unsublated. The commonly used example that illustrates epistemic-nonsublatability is that the rope that appears as a snake from a distance (a stock example in Indian philosophy). the assumption that one sees a snake during this circumstance is erroneous consistent with Advaita Vedānta because the snake belief (and the visual presentation of a snake) is sublated into the judgment that what one is basically seeing may be a rope. Only wrong cognitions are often sublated. The condition of foundationality disqualifies memory as a way of data. Memory is that the recollection of something already known and is thus derivable and not foundational. Only genuine knowledge of the Self, consistent with Advaita Vedānta, passes the test of foundationality: it's born of immediate knowledge (*aparokṣa jñāna*) and not memory (*smṛti*). Six natural ways of knowing are accepted as valid means of data (*pramāṇa*) by Advaita Vedānta: perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), verbal

testimony (*śabda*), comparison (*upamāna*), postulation (*arthāpatti*) and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*). The *pramāṇas* don't contradict one another and every of them presents a definite quite knowledge. Non foundational knowledge of Brahman can't be had by any means but through Śruti, which is that the supernaturally revealed text within the sort of the Vedas (of which the Upaniṣads form the foremost philosophical portion). Inference and therefore the other means of data cannot determinately reveal the reality of Brahman on their own. However, Advaitins recognize that additionally to Śruti, one requires *yukti* (reason) and *anubhava* (personal experience) to actualize knowledge of Brahman. Mokṣa (liberation), which consists within the cessation of the cycle of life and death, governed by the karma of the individual self, is that the results of knowledge of Brahman. As Brahman is identical with the universal Self, and this Self is usually self-conscious, it might seem that knowledge of Brahman is Self-knowledge, which this Self-knowledge is ever present. If so, it seems that ignorance is impossible. Moreover, within the *adhyāsa bhāṣya* (his preamble to the commentary on the Brahma-Sūtra Śaṅkara says that the pure subjectivity—the Self or Brahman—can never become the thing of data, even as the thing can never be the topic. This is able to suggest that Self-knowledge that one gains so as to realize liberation is impossible. Śaṅkara's response to the present problem is to take knowledge of Brahman that's necessary for liberation, derived from scripture, to be distinct from the Self-consciousness of Brahman, and rather a practical knowledge that removes ignorance, which is an obstacle to the luminance of the ever-present self-consciousness of Brahman that does pass the test of foundationality. Ignorance, in turn, isn't a feature of the last word Self on his account, but a feature of the individual self that's ultimately unreal. Four factors are involved in an external perception: the object, the sensory receptor, the mind (*antaḥkarana*) and therefore the cognizing self (*pramāta*). The cognizing self alone is self-luminous and therefore the remainder of the three factors aren't self-luminous being barren of consciousness. It's the mind and therefore the sensory receptor which relates the cognizing self to the thing. The self alone is that the knower and therefore the rest are knowable as objects of data. At an equivalent time the existence of mind is indubitable. It's the mind that helps to differentiate between various perceptions. It's due to the self-luminous (*svata-prakāśa*) nature of pure consciousness that the topic knows and therefore the object is understood. In his commentary to Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Śaṅkara says that “consciousness is that the very nature of the Self and inseparable from It.” The cognizing self, the known object, the object-knowledge, and therefore the valid means of data (*pramāṇa*) are essentially the manifestations of one pure consciousness.¹⁰

Error, True Knowledge and Practical Teachings

Śaṅkara uses *adhyāsa* to point illusion – illusory objects of perception also as illusory perception. Two other words which are wont to denote an equivalent are *adhyāropa* (superimposition) and *avabhāsa* (appearance). consistent with Śaṅkara the case of illusion involves both superimposition and appearance. *Adhyāsa*, as he says in his preamble to the Brahma-Sūtra, is that the apprehension of something as something else with two sorts of confounding like the thing and its properties. The concept of illusion, in Advaita Vedānta, is critical because it results in the idea of a “real substratum.” The illusory object, just like the real object, features a definite locus. consistent with Śaṅkara, *adhyāsa* is impossible without a substratum. Padmapāda says in *Pañcapādikā* that *adhyāsa* without a substratum has never been experienced and is

inconceivable. Vācaspati affirms that there can't be a case of illusion where the substratum is fully apprehended or not apprehended in the least. The Advaita theory of error (known as *anirvacanīya khyāti*, or the apprehension of the indefinable) holds that the perception of the illusory object may be a product of the ignorance about the substratum. Śāṅkara characterizes illusion in two ways in his commentary on the Brahma-Sūtra. The primary is an appearance of something previously experienced—like memory—in something else (*smṛtirupaḥ paratra pūrva dr̥ṣṭaḥ avabhāsaḥ*). The second may be a minimalist characterization—the appearance of 1 thing with the properties of another (*anyasya anyadharmā avabhāsatam*). Śāṅkara devotes his introduction to his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, to the thought of *adhyāsa* to account for illusory perception concerning both everyday experience and also transcendent entities.⁸ This introduction, called the *adhyāsa bhāṣya* (commentary on illusion) presents a sensible position and a seemingly dualistic metaphysics: “Since it's a longtime incontrovertible fact that the thing and subject which are presented as *yusmad*—‘you’ /the other, and *asmad*—‘me’ are by very nature contradictory, and their qualities also contradictory, as light and darkness they can't be identical.” Plurality and illusion, on this account, are constructed out of the cognitive superimposition of the category of objects on pure subjectivity. While two conceptual categories are superimposed to make objects of illusion, the Advaita Vedānta view is that the sole possible way of metaphysically describing the thing of illusion is with the assistance of a characteristic, aside from those of non-existence and existence, which is termed because the “indeterminate” (*anirvacaniya*) which also somehow connects the usual possibilities of existence and non-existence. the thing of illusion can't be logically defined as real or unreal. Error is that the apprehension of the indefinable. it's thanks to the “illegitimate transference” of the qualities of 1 order to a different. Perceptual illusion forms the bridge between Advaita's soteriology, on the one hand, and its theory of experience, on the opposite. the connection between the experience of liberation during this life (*mukti*) and everyday experience is viewed as analogous to the relation between veridical and delusive sense perception. Śāṅkara formulates a theory of data in accordance together with his soteriological views. Śāṅkara's interest is thus to not build a theory of error and leave it by itself but to attach it to his theory of the last word reality of Self-Consciousness which is that the only state which may be true consistent with his twin criteria for truth (non-sublatability and foundationality). The characteristic of indeterminacy that qualifies objects of illusion is that which is actually neither real nor unreal but appears as a true locus. It is a stark contrast to the soteriological goal of the Self, which is actually real and determinate. On the idea of his theory of data, Śāṅkara elucidates the fourfold (mental and physical) practices or qualifications—*sādhana catuṣṭaya*—to aid within the achievement of liberation: (i) the discrimination (*viveka*) between the permanent (*nitya*) and therefore the impermanent (*anitya*) objects of experience; (ii) dispassion towards the enjoyment of fruits of action here and in heaven; (iii) accomplishment of means of discipline like calmness, mental control etc. (*Ihamutraphalbhogaviraga*) (iv) a looking for liberation (*mumukṣatva*). In his commentary to the Brahma-Sūtra, Śāṅkara says that the inquiry into Brahman could start only after acquiring these fourfold qualifications. The concept of liberation (*mokṣa*) in Advaita is cashed call at terms of Brahman. The pathways to liberations are defined by the removal of self-ignorance that's caused by the removal of *mithyajñāna* (erroneous knowledge claims). this is often captured within the formula of Advaitin: “[He] isn't born again who knows that he's the sole one altogether beings just like the ether which all beings are in him.”¹¹ Many thinkers within the history of Indian philosophy have held

that there's a crucial connection between action and liberation. In contrast, Śaṅkara rejects the idea of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, the mixture of karma (Vedic duties) with knowledge of Brahman resulting in liberation. Knowledge of Brahman alone is that the route to liberation for Śaṅkara. The role of action (karma) is to purify the mind (*antaḥkaranasuddhi*) and make it free from likes and dislikes (*rāga dveṣa vimuktaḥ*). Such a mind are going to be instrumental to knowledge of Brahman.¹²

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