



A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE THEORY OF CAUSATION IN VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

Sujit Maity

Assistant Professor

Department of philosophy

Bajkul MilaniMahavidyalaya

Kismat Bajkul, West Bengal, India

Phone No: 8145395092

Email. ID: maitysujit1@gmail.com

Vedānta is originally the name given to the Upanisads because they are the last division (anta) of the Veda because they impart the ultimate form (anta) of Vedic knowledge. The Upanisadic teachings are the original Vedanta teachings. Radhakrishnan refers to Śankara's philosophy. But later on, Śankara was more prominent in his teaching, and the word 'Vedanta' came to denote only the teachings of Śankara's Vedānta. Śankara's teachings form only the central portion of the vast literature which is known by the term Vedānta. There are several schools of the Vedānta. Śankara's Vedānta is called *Advaitavāda*. The other schools are *visistadvaitavāda* of Rāmānuja, *Dvaitavāda* of Mādhvacārya *Dvaitadvaitavāda* of Nimbārka and *Śuddhadvaitavāda* of Vallabha.

In the Māndaka *upanisad* it is found that *Ānanda* is the beginning and the end of the world, the cause as well as the effect, the root as well as the shoot of the universe. The efficient and the final causes are one. God is known as *Prajñāna*, or the eternally active, self-conscious reason. He is responsible for the whole realm of change. Brahman is the sole and whole explanation of the world, its material and efficient cause. The world's entities are known as the rope of development, which begins with matter and ends with *Ānanda*. According to the commentators, Hiraṇyagarbha is the efficient cause of the universe. *Ānandatirtha* and Vijñāna Bhikṣu take this sutra to mean that Brahman is merely the efficient cause of the universe, while the other commentators hold that Brahman is both the material (upādāna) and the efficient (*nimitta*) cause. Bhāskara and Vallabha accept the view that, though Brahman is without parts, the cosmos is the transformation of Brahman. Hence, according to them, Brahman itself is the material cause of transformation, while Vijñāna Bhikṣu holds that *Prakṛti* alone is transformed, though Brahman too, being the locus of *Prakṛti*, may be said to be the material cause. Śankara and Rāmānuja are of the opinion that, even though *Prakṛti* alone is immediately transformed, *Prakṛti* and Brahman are inseparable, both being related as the body and it's in inhabitant (*Prakṛti* being the body of Brahman) Hence they accept the view that Brahman is the material cause, since Brahman too is transformed together with *Prakṛti*.

The problem of causation is the pivot around which the doctrines of a system revolve in Indian Philosophy. With the exception of a few, the systems of Indian Philosophy formulate their fundamental doctrines while keeping the relationship of cause and effect in mind. However, Indian philosophers frequently disagree when it comes to explaining the relationship between cause and effect. As a matter of fact, some rival theories relating to the problem of causation have developed. The present paper will deal with the theory of causality from the point of view of Advaita Vedānta.

It is generally believed that the Cārvāka School alone denies the causal relationship. But in the Nyāyakusumāñjali Udayana mentions as many as five schools, known as *Ākasmikavādin-s*, who refuse to accept the causation and formulate the theories of *ahet. abhūti, svotpatti, anupākhyopatti* and *svabhāva*. They are of the view that an effect comes into being without being dependent upon any cause (*ākasmika*). The *ahetu* theorists say there is no cause at all, whereas the *abhūti* theorists deny all production. The *svotpatti* theorists reject all foreign causes, while the *anupākhyotpatti* theorists reject all real causes. The Cārvākas hold that the effects, though occasional, may exist at certain times because it is in their nature. In the *Nyāyakusumāñjali* Udayana seeks to establish the theory of causality, rejecting all these theories. If causation of effects were denied, then, Udayana claims, being unconditioned, they would exist at all times. He further says that if origination were denied, then an effect would never come into being. Things cannot be self-produced as nothing is capable of producing itself. If effects were produced from unreal causes, then they would lose their reality. The nature of an effect cannot delimit the prior existence of an occasional effect. Udayana maintains that every effect must have a cause because it is occasional. Effect being occasional (*kādācitka*) cannot be unconditioned. If it were so, it would always be there or not be at all. So it is to be

admitted that an occasional effect must have a prior limit, and that limit is "cause". In the Indian tradition, the theorists disagree in explaining the nature of the factor responsible for the generation of an effect as well as in accepting the relationship between a cause and an effect. Some say the effect is different from the cause, some others hold that the effect is different and non-different from the cause; others say the effect is identical with the cause and again, some others say the concept of causality is ultimately unsustainable. The Naiyāyikas admit the first standpoint and the Sāṃkhya philosophers the second. The Advaita Vedāntins headed by Śankara accept the third view, while Nagarjuna and Gaudapāda the fourth one.

It is an admitted fact that all phenomenal events and experiences, the development of scientific knowledge and our daily life are governed by the principle of causality. But Gaudapāda, a transcendentalist philosopher, expresses a grave doubt about its usefulness and functioning in relation to Ultimate Reality. Gaudapāda is the grand teacher of Śankara. His *Mandukyakārikā* represents the earliest Advaita literature. He views both the subjective and objective worlds from the transcendental level. According to him, the objects experienced in the waking and dream states are imagined in mind. "As dream, illusion and the town of Gandharvas are seen, so is seen the universe by those who are well-versed in the Vedānta. He advocates the theory of non-origination (*ajātivāda*). Usually, the different systems of Indian philosophy admit the theory of origination (*jātivāda*). They are of the view that things around us are produced: they have the causes. But there is a hot debate among them; some say the origination is of a thing that is already existent. Others hold that it is of something which is non-existent. Although there are Upanisadic texts that support both views equally, Gaudapāda asserts that there is no origination (*jāti*) from the existent or non-existent. The thing which is already existent does not come into being. Similarly, the thing which is non-existent or unborn does not come into being. So, the champions of the theory of *advaya*, Gaudapāda says, reject these two extreme views and declare absolute non-becoming (*jāti*).

It is to be noted here that as regards the origination of an effect by its cause, three orders are possible; (a) first there is the cause and then the effect (*pūrva-karma*), (b) first there is the effect and then the cause (*apara-krama*) and (c) the cause and effect are simultaneous (*sahakrama*). These three orders of cause and effect indicate three propositions. According to the prior order (*pūrva-krama*), the cause produces its effect. According to the posterior order (*apara-krama*), the effect produces its cause, whereas according to the order of simultaneity (*sahakrama*), the cause and its effect produce each other. While analysing the concept of causality in the fourth chapter of the *Mandukyakārikā* Gaudapada deals with the second and third propositions. Either he omits the first proposition or the *kirika* dealing with the first proposition is lost to us. He holds that the cause coming into being from the effect cannot produce the effect. He further affirms that if cause and effect are simultaneous, they cannot be related to each other as the two horns of a cow. Thus Gaudapāda seeks to establish that the theory of non-origination (*ajātivāda*) is the real philosophy of the Upaniṣads. This view of Gaudapāda may cause confusion in the mind of the inquisitive reader of the Upaniṣad, inasmuch as there are a large number of Upanisadic texts that deal with the theory of creation. To my mind Gaudapāda always emphasizes the theory of non-origination or non-cause from the absolute point of view. He formulates the theory for a person who is established in *turīya* or Brahman. So there is no contradiction that for a man who has not realised Brahman or reached the covetable state of *turīya* and is still in the phenomenal order of reality, the concepts of causality and creation seem to be valid. It deserves to be mentioned here that Bādarāyana, the writer of the *Brahmasūtra*, accepts the non-difference of cause and effect on the authority of the Chāndogya - text *vācārambhanam vikāro nāmādheyam mrttiketyeva satyam*". In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad Arupi gives an example of the clod of clay and its effects in order to remove Śvetaketu's doubt regarding the thesis that through the cognition of one thing, everything is cognized. Āruni declares that clay is only real, while all effects made of clay have their origin in speech. This Upanisadic statement speaks of the unreality of all effects. The effects have no reality apart from their causes. So the cognition of one clod of clay gives rise to the cognition of all that is made of clay. Similarly, by the cognition of Brahman, the Ultimate Cause, all the phenomena become cognized. Śankara in his *Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra* deals with the relation of cause and effect in much detail. According to him, the effect is non-different from the cause; it has no existence apart from the cause. All effects, such as jars, dishes, and so on, are mere names. They exist through and originate from the language alone. In reality, there exists no such thing as a modification. So far as the effects like jars, dishes, etc., are named, they are unreal. So far as they are clay, they are real. Keeping this in view, Śankara holds that cause and effect are identical". As the part of ethereal space which is limited by jar (*ghatākāśa*) is not really different from the all-pervasive ethereal space, so the manifold world with its objects of enjoyment and enjoyers has no existence apart from Brahman. The doctrine formulated by Śankara is known as *satkāranavāda*.

It may not be wrong to say that Śankara adopts Gaudapāda's philosophy of non-origination (*ajātivāda*) but with an emphasis on realism. He admits the theory of causation in the phenomenal order of reality. But he does not assign to creation any ultimate ontological status. Like Gaudapāda, Śankara also realizes the contradictions in the doctrine of causation that lead him to introduce the theory of *vivarta* in the Advaita scheme as the ultimate explanation of all cosmic events.

The Vedānta philosophy looked at the constantly changing phenomena of the world's appearance and sought to discover the root cause from whence proceeded the endless series of events and effects. In this theory, effects are altogether new productions caused by the invariable, unconditional and immediately preceding antecedents. A cause in what must produce its effect is indefinable, inexplicable, and logically inconceivable. All the characteristics of the effects are indescribable and indefinable *ajñāna* of *māyā*. *Māyā* is the transformative material (*parināmi upādāna*) cause of world phenomena. It is a principle without which the theory of creation cannot be explained satisfactorily. So, Śankara admits the theory of creation and causality in the domain of man but the principle of causation is left behind in the transcendental level. It is often said that

Śankara School of Vedānta Vedānta advocates the theory of *satkāraṇa*, whereas the Sāṅkhya system subscribes to the theory of *satkārya*. These two theories are believed to be opposed to each other. The theory of *satkāraṇa* is consistent with the theory of *vivarta* as admitted by Śankara and his followers, while the theory of *satkārya* is compatible with the theory of *parināma* as projected by the Sāṅkhya philosophers. In *vivartavāda*, the effect is an unreal manifestation, whereas in *parināmavāda*, it is a real transformation. In the former, the effect does not in any way affect the essential nature of the cause, whereas in the latter, the effect actually modifies the nature of the cause. In the former, the effect is not different from its cause, whereas in the latter, the effect is as real as its cause. In the former, the order of reality of the effect is lower than that of the cause, whereas in the latter, the order of reality of the cause and effect is the same. This may lead a reader to think that Śankara and his followers who formulate the theory of *satkāraṇa* do not subscribe to the theory of *satkārya*.

On close scrutiny, it reveals that Śankara supports both the theories of *satkāraṇa* and *satkārya*. In the commentary to the *Brahmasūtra* he refutes the theory of *asatkārya* and defends the theory of *satkārya*. "He argues that the champions of the theory of *asatkāryavāda* cannot negate the existence of the effect prior to its origination, since this negation is a mere negation without an object to be negated. Śankara says that the effect is to be viewed as 'existent in the cause before and after its origination. The effect does not exist independently of a nature other than that of the cause. It cannot be said that, according to Advaita Vedānta, the effect does not exist before its actual beginning. The existence of the effect as the cause is in no way different before and after its origination. Śankara's *satkāryavāda* is related to the theory of transformation of *māyā*. Before the origination the world - phenomena remain in *māyā*, their transformative material cause, in an unmanifest state of name and form. Brahman is the *vivarta upādāna* of the world phenomena, whereas *māyā*, the cosmic principle, is their *parināmi upādāna*. Brahman and *māyā* are together the material cause of the world-order. But Śankara's *satkāryavāda* is fundamentally different from Isvarakṛṣṇa's *satkāryavāda*. According to Sāṅkhya *satkāryavāda*, the effect exists in its cause 'as an effect in a dormant form (*kāraṇe sat*) before its origination, whereas according to Advaita *satkāryavāda*, the effect remains as the cause before its origination (*kāraṇātmaṇa sat*). Thus it comes to light that Śankara and his followers defend the philosophies of both *satkāraṇavāda* and *satkāryavāda*. The teachers of Advaita Vedānta acknowledge the theory of *satkāraṇa* in the transcendent level of reality, as they put emphasis on a cause as also deny the separate existence of an effect apart from that of its cause. In fact, they do not reject the theory of *satkārya* in the domain of phenomena. Unlike the Sāṅkhya philosophers they are not in favour of its application to the transcendent aspect of Brahman. It is an undeniable fact that in Advaita cosmology both *parināmavāda* and *vivartavāda* have significant roles. In the three-stepped hierarchy of Advaita cosmology *parināmavāda* is the first stage, *vivartavāda* is the second, and the last stage is the transcendence of the principle of causation.

Bibliography:

1. Bādarāyana, *Brahmasūtra*, ed. Ananta Krisna Sastri, re-ed. Bhargav Sastri. Nirnaya Sagar Press. Bombay (1938)
2. Chāndogya *Upanisad*, ed. Durgacharan Samkhya - Vedantatirtha. Dev Sahitya Kutir, Calcutta (1984)
3. Gaudapāda, *Māndukyukārika*, ed. Durgacharan Samkhya - Vedantatirtha. Dev Sahitya Kutir. Calcutta (1355 BS)
4. Śankara Sankarabhasya, ed. Ananta Krisna Sastri, re - ed. Bhargav Sastri. Nimaya Sagar Press. Bombay (1938) Press, Puna (1918)
5. Sarvajnatman, *Śaṅkṣepaśārīraka*, ed. Ranganatha Sastri, Anandasram Samskrit Series. No. 83,
6. Anandasam -*Taittiriya Upanisad*, in Ten Principal Upanisad, ed. Govinda Sastri. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi (Reprint 2000) Benares (1912)
7. Udayana, *Nyāyākusūmāñjali*, ed. Laxman Shastri Dravid, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Book Depot. Vidya Vilas Press.