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The Advaita Theory of Perception

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Abstract

My present project concern itself how the term perception enplane by Advaita. According to the Advaita theory of Perception, it is the Chaitanya within us that makes perception possible,. The Chetana (intelligence) within us unites with the chenta in the object, and result is perception. The following well-know illustration from the Vedanta paribhasa gives an account of the nature of perception: “as water from a tank may flow through a channel into a plot of land and assume in shape, so the radiant mind (tajjasa-Antahkarana) goes out through the eye or any Vedanta paribhasa cites instances, of perception experience where no sense contact is involved 5, such as pleasure pain, other internal perceptions where moder of mind are directly apprehended, further, it clearly states that the fact of the sense organ is not the

Keywords

Chaitanga, Sannikarsa, Upadhis, Upadhi, Ghatakasa, Kala, Asasa, Kula, Nirupadhika, Paricayaka, Vritti, Janta, Jneya, Advaita, Pramata.

To the Advaitins the whole world is nothing but the manifestation of Brahman *oxAtman* or Consciousness (*Caitanya*). Keeping this presupposition in view Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, a philosopher belonging to the Advaita school, thinks that mere connec-¹tion (*sannikarsa*) between sense-organ and an object is not the cause of perceptual cognition. If the whole world is covered by the Consciousness (*Caitanya*), an object ontologically cannot remain without being covered by the said Consciousness. If the Consciousness were taken as an all-pervading entity, it would logically follow that nothing is left uncovered by this. Hence all the objects including sense-organ etc are covered by this. Though the Reality or the Consciousness is one, it may have some limited forms which are called limiting adjuncts (*upadhis*) for our phenomenal necessity. The *Upadhi* or limiting adjunct experienced in our life is called constitutive while the main entity, which is free from limiting adjuncts (*niravacchinna or nirupadhika*) is called regulative. In the Dialectic part of the *Critique of the Pure Reason* Kant institutes a distinction between regulative and constitutive ideas in the context of cosmological ideas. By 'ideas' Kant means a set of *apriori* ideas such that are derived from Reason, the highest human faculty. One feature of these ideas is that there can never be intuitions or facts corresponding to them. But they do regulate the ways in which certain other ideas are to be used. Freedom, Ought, Immortality of the soul, God etc. are regulative notions. The constitutive ideas always have intuitions corresponding to them, and together they render knowledge possible. The *apriori* categories of understanding are constitutive notions. They are *apriori* but intentional, and it is with their help that we can organize the world as and when we come to know it. The result of the application of constitutive ideas is verifiability. But the application of the

regulative ideas is never verifiable, but they can be dispensed with. They are unalienable presuppositions of human state of affairs. The limiting adjuncts like *ghatakasa* (space limited by ajar), month, week, day, night etc. are constitutive in the sense that they have intuitions corresponding to them through which our phenomenal purpose is served while the absolute entities like Time (*kala*), Space (*akasa*) etc. that are free from limiting adjuncts (*nirupadhika*) are accepted as regulative on account of the fact that they are accepted ontologically but not verifiable through experience or there we do not find intuitions or facts corresponding to them. That is why; *upadhi* is called an introducer (*paricayaka*) by the Naiyayikas.¹

The Advaitins also accept three types of Consciousness though it is ontologically one. These limiting adjuncts are Consciousness limited by an object (*visayavacchinnacaitanya*), Consciousness limited by the mental mode in the form of an object (*antahkaranavrtyavacchinnacaitanya*) and Consciousness limited by mind (*antahkaranavacchinnacaitanya*). These limiting adjuncts of the Consciousness are technically called *visayacaitanya*, *pramanacaitanya* and *pramatrcaitanya* respectively² just as Time, though one in number, has got various limiting adjuncts like hour, month, week, fortnight etc. Keeping these metaphysical presuppositions in view Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has accepted two criteria of perceptuality- *Jnanagata* (existing in cognition) and *visayagata* (existing in an object). To him when there is a union between *pramanacaitanya* (Consciousness limited by mental mode-*antahkaranavrtyi*) and *visayacaitanya* (Consciousness limited by an object), there is the perceptuality of knowledge or cognition (*jnanagatapratyaksatva*).³ It is to be borne in mind that he has made a clear distinction between perception of the knowledge of a jar and perception of ajar. In the case of the perception of the knowledge of a jar there is a unity between *visayacaitanya* and *pramanacaitanya*, but *pramatrcaitanya* remains isolated under such situation. How is such union of these *caitanyas* possible? Dharmaraja Adhvarindra had made an effort to convince about the logic of such description. When our mind goes out of the body with the help of the sense-organ and assumes the shape of the object then it called mental mode (*vrtyi*) which is also a limited form of the Consciousness. To them mind or *antahkarana* has no shape of its own just as a liquid substance but it can assume the shape of the object just as water assumes the form of the container. If this were the case, the *visayacaitanya* (Consciousness limited by an object) becomes identified with its corresponding mental mode (*antahkaranavrtyi*). The union of these two limited forms of consciousness gives rise to the perception of the knowledge of an object. The *Pramatrcaitanya* (Consciousness limited by mind) who, being a knower, remains isolated and perceives the knowledge of an object (*jnanagatapratyaksatva*)⁴, after retaining its character of being a knower. In this case there is the distinction between a knower (*jnata*) and a known object (*jneya*). That is why; it is the perceptuality of knowledge of an object (*jnanagatapratyaksatva*). In this case the cognition of an object is perceived.

In the case of inference etc. the mind does not go to the space occupied by fire etc. on account of the fact that the latter is not in connection with the eye etc. In the same way, in the perceptual cognition of a jar in the form-'This jar', the jar etc. and their corresponding mental states in the form of those are united in the same space outside the body, and hence the Consciousness limited by both is one and the same. For, the mental states and objects like jar etc. do not produce any difference due to their occupation of the same space. On account of this the ether limited by a jar existing in a temple is not different from the ether limited by temple. In the like manner, in the perception of a jar as 'This jar', the mental state in the form of the jar being in contact with the jar, the Consciousness limited by that mental state is not different from the Consciousness limited by the jar and hence in the knowledge of a jar there is a perception so far as the jar is concerned. One can perceive the cognition-'I am happy', because the Consciousness limited by happiness etc. and the Consciousness limited by the mental state in the form of that are invariably limited by two adjuncts occupying the same space. It may be argued that when an individual recollects happiness etc. of the past, he may have perceptual experience of

the happiness remaining in the past. In reply it can be said that perception is not possible in such cases. Because the happiness that is recollected from the past is a past event and the mental state in the form of the recollection of the same is a present event. As these two limiting adjuncts in the mind remain in two different times, the criterion of the unification of the two is not maintained. Hence in such cases the perceptual awareness is not possible.

It may again argued that when someone realizes the righteousness etc. existing in him through verbal testimony, it may be taken as perceptual due the identification of the Consciousness in the form of righteousness and its corresponding mental state. This is not acceptable, because any object cannot come under the purview of perception. In this case the righteousness is not capable of being perceived. Hence the question of its perception does not arise at all. In the case of the cognition in the form-'The Mountain is fiery' there is perceptuality so far as the mountain is concerned, because there we find the amalgamation of the two forms of Consciousness i.e., the Consciousness in the form of mountain and its corresponding mental state. So far as the cognition of fire is concerned, it is inferential due to not fulfilling the above-mentioned criterion. Applying the same principle it can be said that in the case of the cognition in the form: 'The sandal wood is fragrant', the knowledge of the sandalwood is perceptual while the cognition of fragrance is inferential.

There is another type of perception, which is called the perceptuality of an object (*visayagatapratyaksatva*). By virtue of being cognition of an object in the previous case there is a knower; otherwise the knowledge of an object becomes meaningless. If it is said that there is the perceptuality of an object, it should be treated as different from the earlier one. It is *not* knowledge, which is perceived, but the object only. Such a situation cannot give rise to knower-known relationship (*jnatr-jneya-bhavasambandha*). Hence Dharmaraja Adhvarindra opines that in such cases there is only the knower in the form of consciousness (*pramatracaitanya*); but the other two i.e., consciousness limited by mental mode (*antahkaranavrtti*) and consciousness limited by an object are united in the knower (*pramata*) and are absorbed in it. It is described by him as (*pramatsattatiriktasattakatvabhavah*' i.e., there will be an absence of the existence of the other forms of consciousness excepting the existence of *pramata* or knower.⁵ It has been said that the amalgamation of the three into one is not the real intention (*na tavadaikyam*), but it is the awareness of the existence of the *Pramatracaitanya* in which other forms of Consciousness are subsumed. Therefore, the *pramatracaitanya* would be an object of our awareness, but other forms of the same are the manifestations of the *pramatracaitanya* and hence their existence does not come to our awareness.

When a person thinks himself identified with the world, it is the stage of liberation due to the absence of more than one Reality (*Advaita*). At this stage an object is 'not merely an object \ but 'subjectified object \ Though there is no difference between the expressions 'subjectified object' and 'objectified subject' as evidenced in the *Bhagavadgita*-'*Sarvabhutasthamatmanam sarvabhutani catmanV*⁶ (i.e., extension of self to others and bringing other§ under self), Dharmaraja preferred to use 'subjectified object \ since *pramata* (knower) only remains at this stage being identified with others. In this case an object or *visaya* is engulfed by the *pramata* or knower. As the knower (*pramata*) sees himself in the object, it may be called self-perception (*atmagatapratyaksatva*). Moreover, self is the locus (*adhithana*) on which the object is superimposed in the phenomenal stage. To the Advaitins locus or *adhithana* is never contradicted (*avadhita*) by the subsequent cognition. In the case of snake-rope illusion the locus i.e./rope is not contradicted but the superimposed object or *adhyasta* i.e., snake is contradicted by the cognition of the locus i.e., rope. In the like manner the Advaitins believe that Brahman or Self in the locus on which all the objects are superimposed. For this reason the cognition of the phenomenal objects are contradicted, because they are sublated by the Ultimate Reality. Keeping the above clarifications in view it may be said that in the case of the perceptuality of an object

(visayagatapratyaksatva) the object is not vanished, but it is known as the form of self, which remains always uncontradicted. Any type of love presupposes the extension of self to the object of love. Our love will know no bound if self is extended to the all corners of the world. If we can extend it to the neighbours, countrymen, distressed and downtrodden people, we acquire required ability to love them selflessly. In this way an individual can turn into a philanthropic one and he can think of welfare of all human beings. A person can turn into a real patriot and sacrifice his own life for the sake of the country if and only if he can extend his self to the Nation. For this reason the patriotism is called *desatmabodha* i.e., the feeling of identity between self and the country. In this case also the Nation or country does not remain as isolated from the knower (*pramata*), but the knower brings it within his own self-giving rise to the perceptuality of object.

At the stage of the perceptuality of an object there is the absence of the existence of other objects excepting the existence of knower (*pramata*). Is it not a state of liberation? Such a situation is found temporally at the time of aesthetic enjoyment (*rasa*). Abhinavagupta has explained this state of 'subjectified object'⁹ as the melting of the state of the knower or *pramata* (*pramatrbhavavigalana*).⁷ Just as an object when liquidified covers many areas, in the like manner the knower can expand itself in such a way so that all objects are included in him. At this time he is not confined within himself but expanded himself to all the objects and hence objects have no other existence other than that of the knower. That is why; an individual can enjoy aesthetic pleasure (*rasa*) as he considers the pathos etc. belonging to characters of the novel or drama as his own due to emotional involvement. This sharing of others feeling is called by Abhinavagupta as *tanmayibhavana* i.e., becoming one with other.⁸ Actually the feeling existing in an individual is transmitted to all the spectators. If each and every reader *receives the* same sensitivity or feeling, there is a corresponding fact, which is going on in *all the* hearts of the spectators (*sakala-sahrdaya-samvada-salita*). Such a phenomenon is otherwise known as 'absorption of all the audiences towards a particular object' (*sarvasamajikanam ekaghanata*)⁹. To Visvsnatha also the subject i.e., *pramata* sees himself being identified with it (*pramata tadabhedena svatmanam pratipadyate*)¹⁰. In fact, self exists everywhere including the art-object. Hence the Aestheticians are of the opinion that the relishment itself is *rasa* (*rasaniyah rasah*). It is the relishment of the bliss arising out of self-knowledge (as reflected in the characters of the drama), which is called *svavidananda* (pleasure arising from self-cognition), as if we have undertaken an activity of chewing (*carvanavyapara*) the bliss generating from self-knowledge. To Abhinavagupta who is chiefly influenced by the Advaitins such a chewing activity of the bliss of the self-knowledge is called *Rasa*.¹¹ This interpretation of aesthetic experience would not have been possible, had there been no solid foundation of the perceptuality of object (*Visayagatapratyaksatva*). In fact the aesthetic enjoyment is nothing but the extension of self to the object, which is called *Visayagatapratyaksa*.

A question may be raised whether such *visayagatapratyaksa* is equivalent to the Advaita concept of liberation or not. In reply, it can be said that such perception and the aesthetic enjoyment is qualitatively same but quantitatively different. When *ajar* is perceived, there is the feeling of the non-duality of the self and the *jar* until the absorption breaks up. When such absorption does not break, an individual will see the whole world as his own self. This non-dual experience will remain forever and such situation is described as liberation according to the Advaitins. The perceptual experience of the phenomenal objects like *ajar* etc. occurs temporally and hence it is, though qualitatively same, it is quantitatively different. Both the experiences- the *visayagatapratyaksa* and aesthetic experience contain disinterested pleasure arising out of self-relishment-*atmananda*. In fact a human being's mind is dominated by the *sattvaguna* at this situation and hence it is touched by *rajah* and *tamoguna*. Due to the prominence of *sattvaguna* an individual can enjoy the self-knowledge identified with him and hence he is not . touched by any other knowledge (*vedyantarasparsasunya*). This bliss is a highest type of *ananda* arising from self-revelation (*svaprakasananda*), which is qualitatively equivalent to the taste of Brahman, but not quantitatively, as the

former is transitory and the latter is eternal. That is why, such pleasure is described as *Brahmasvadasahodara*¹² (i.e., the smaller manifestation of the taste of Brahman).

The aesthetic experience, which is very much common in each and every man's life, can be a live testimony of the existence of the perception of an object. Such an experience may be an instance to an enquirer to the fact how an object can come under the purview of the subject spontaneously through such perception. If it is possible in the aesthetic world, why not is it possible in other fields?

The indeterminate perception or *nirvikalpaka pratyaksa* is accepted in the case of the cognitive cognitions like 'This is that Devadatta' (*so yam devadattah*) or 'That art thou' (*tattvamasi*) on account of the fact that it does not reveal the relation between the two i.e., this and that Devadatta or That and thou. It has been interpreted by the Advaitins that the sentence conveys the sense that Devadatta exists in Devadatta himself or an individual self exists in himself in the form of Brahman. But they do not admit relation between two by the term - (*vaisistyanavagahi*) \ If the meaning of the aforesaid sentences is pondered upon, it will be revealed that these are not actually relation-free. In other words, like other components the relation is also revealed in such cases due to the following reasons. First, how do we know that Devadatta exists in himself without the assumption of the relation of identity between them? Any type of cognitive cognition presupposes the relation of identity (at least in the sense of similarity) between two existing earlier or at present time. To the Advaitins identity or *tadatmya* is the vital relation in the phenomenal cognition. In fact, they admit *tadatmya* in the places where there is a part and whole relation (*avayava-avayavi-bhava- sambandha*) etc. In fact, the Vaisesikas would accept *samavaya* or inherence as a relation in these cases. Hence *tadatmya* has very often been accepted as a relation. In the cases cited above there must be a relation of identity (*tadatmya*) in the sense of similarity between them. That is why, the cognitive knowledge is possible. Secondly, though there is no absolute identity between this Devadatta and that Devadatta or an individual being and Brahman, there must be an essential identity (*svrupatadatmya*) between them. Otherwise, the sentences could not have provided the intended meaning. Lastly, the cognition coming through the sentences are called relational in character, as it is sentential in nature. A sentence becomes meaningful if there is a word, its meaning and their relation. It may be asked whether in the words and their meaning there is *vacya-vacaka-bhava* (i.e., expresser-expressed relationship) or not. If the answer is in positive, relation is accepted between them. If not, the sentences cannot provide the desired meaning due to the lack of *vacakatva* (expressive character) of the words. In fact, Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has accepted the meaningfulness of the sentences, which entails the existence of the relation in them. Hence the definition of *nirvikalpaka* perception as formulated by the Advaitins is hardly adequate. At least this type of definition fails to justify *nirvikalpaka* cognition. The problem has been well taken by the Advaitins. To them the meaning of the sentences like 'so yam devadattah' or 'Tat tvamasi' etc is indivisible (*akhandartha*). When the sentences produce right cognition without being related to the relation among the words, it is called indivisible meaning. Only the *pratipadikas*, which are free from the suffixes causing relation, can give rise to indivisible meaning. In the case of the *nirvikalpaka* sentence there is no relation between the meanings of the terms, but it gives an indivisible meaning after ignoring the individual ones. (*Idameva tattvamasi ityadivakyam akhandartham yat samsarganavagahi-yatharthajnanajanakatvam iti*).

Two types of perception, apart from the previously mentioned one, are *jivasaksi* and *isvarasaksi*. It has been mentioned that the distinction between an individual being (*jiva*) and witness in self (*jivasaksi*) lies on the status of internal sense-organ (*antahkarana*). If it remains in an individual being *as* an adjective or *visesana*, it is called *jiva*. If the same *antahkarana* *remains as a* limiting adjunct or *upadhi* in *a* *jiva*, it is called *jivasaksi*. In the same way, the consciousness qualified by *maya* is called *isvara* or God (*mayavacchinnam caitanyam paramesvarah*). When the same *maya* remains as a limiting adjunct (*upadhi*), it is called witness in God

(isvarasaksi). The property, which is related to the predicate (karyanvayi), distinguisher (vyayarttaka) and present (ivartamana) is called visesana while something, which cannot be related to the predicate (karyananvayi), distinguisher (vyavarttaka) and present (vartamana) is called upadhi. Though the distinction between visesana and upadhi has been shown clearly, it is very difficult to understand the exact position whether the inner organ or antahkarana remains in an individual being as an adjunct or limiting adjunct. In the same way the position or status of *maya* in consciousness (*caitanya*) cannot be known with the help of the reason. Without the help of intuition it is very difficult to have an idea about the status of mind in an individual being or the status of *maya* in a consciousness. It needs vision to know the same. If these are known transcendently, why are they called the forms of perception? The phenomena of *jivasaksi* and *isvarasaksi* are more metaphysical in character than epistemological. Hence the Advaitins cannot do 'pure epistemology' without the help of metaphysics.

In connection with the immediate awareness (*aparoksajana*) Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has pointed out that such perceptual awareness may sometimes arise from the testimony also, which is called perceptual awareness generated through verbal testimony (*sabdajanyapratyaksa*).

It has been argued by the Advaitins that, when an individual comes to know of his happiness through the utterance of the sentence-'You are happy' (*tvam sukhi*) by some body else, would it be considered as perceptual? The answer is in the positive, as it is always desired by the Advaitins. They have put forward an example of perceptual awareness through some testimonial cognition. A leader of a team is counting the members of his team to confirm that no body is left behind. Among the ten members every time he is counting nine members but not ten. Being pointed out by some body else he comes to know that he has not counted himself. Ultimately the person pointed him out as the tenth person and said-'You are the tenth' (*dasamastvamasi*). This is a case of perception, no doubt, which is generated through the utterance of the sentence by some body else.¹³ Actually this type of awareness suggests a great domain of the Advaita philosophy. To the Advaitins an individual being is always free, but he does not know it. When it is pointed out that he is free from suffering through the injunction of the *Sastra* or *Agama* or through *sravana* (hearing), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyasana* (meditating), he suddenly sees himself free. This freedom is not new to him, but it is acquirement of what is acquired (*praptasya praptih*). An individual's liberation or freedom is not at all a new achievement, but awareness of something, which is already known. This knowing of the known is possible through the testimonial statement as found in different *Sruti*. The function of the testimony in the form of *Sruti* is to make someone aware about his own position and status. It provides the true picture of human being like his freedom etc. about which he did not know. Hence, perception in the field of freedom or liberation is generated through the agamic statement, which is very much significant in Indian Philosophical systems.

Reference

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