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Philosophical Method of Advaita Vedānta: A critical Appraisal

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Abstract:

The essential philosophy of Advaita of which Śaṅkara was regarded to be as the expounder is an idealistic nondualism. His philosophy and methods comprise a teaching tradition intended to culminate in a direct liberating recognition of nonduality, going by study and correct understanding of Śruti, especially Upanisad. He started his philosophy with the hypothesis 'Brahma satya jagat mithyā jīva Brahmaiva na paraḥ.' Brahma is only reality, individuated jīva is nothing but Brahma or Pure Subject limited by object or mind body complex which are by nature opposed to each other cannot be identified. On this account world of plurality experienced by individual self have been claimed to be fabricated out of the cognitive superimposition of the category of object on pure subjectivity, due to avidyā or avivekajñāna of jīva, and the relation of jīva to avidyā and world is anādi but has an end. Advaitic aspiration is to communicate the Supreme Self through intuition in its true nature beyond the play of the means of knowledge and their object merely by putting an end superimposition of plurality on to it that causes liberation of jīva. This method is quoted by Śaṅkara in his Gītābhāṣya as adhyāropāvāda.

The present paper intends to do an systematic exploration of this Śaṅkarites specific philosophical method, for this, study demands the analysis of the principle of māyā, its status and nature in their conceptual framework, their conception of the world, and liberation so that it can be evaluated how far this methodology has been able to create better understanding of the topic? for which it was resorted to.

Keywords: Avidyā, Sadasadvilakṣana, Adhyāropāvāda, Jīvanmukta, Mokṣa.

Overview on the method of Advaitic teaching: We are of the same mind on one point that it is very difficult to give assent to any specific methods as characteristics of Indian philosophy as a whole and applicable to all the multitudinous systems. Nonetheless the chief mark of Indian philosophy in general is its concentration upon the spirituality. Except for the relatively minor materialistic school of the Carvaka's from the time immemorial it has been felt by aspirants that inner self is the most significant sign of his reality and to that of the universe. To know this reality one must have an actual introspection of it. So intuition is accepted only method through which we can comprehend reality and ensures the eradication of ignorance as the root cause of human sufferings and the concomitant realization of one's

ever-present non-dual nature. A main quest of Vedānta philosophy is the relation between individual self and Ātmān or Brahma, the essential core of one's soul is Brahma. This truth is derived mainly from three authoritative texts, Upaniṣad, Brahma-sūtra and Bhagavadgītā and is regarded to be as self evident. Peculiarity of Advaitic philosophy is that since this school started with the presupposition that Brahma alone to be the ultimate reality, one absolute changeless, and Jivātmā to be the nature of Brahma and this truth is regarded as the self evident immediate direct apprehension. It is not an awareness of Brahma but instead awareness that it is Brahma.¹ By accepting this postulation it had to face various theoretical difficulties of explaining changing manifold. Because it could not afford to conjured away the reality of the world that are confronted, for there are such Upaniṣadic text as 'all this universe is in truth nothing but the Absolute'² nor did it want to give up his presupposition which it believes to be the correct understanding of the Śruti, because we are well aware that the concern of the Upaniṣad is to communicate to sincere enquirers direct experience of the Supreme Reality as their own self. Nor they reasoned away the visible realm by the negative dialectics as in the case of the teaching of the Buddhist nihilist. Therefore Advaitic tradition had to offer distinct answer for. But they did subscribe to the view that this duality is mere illusion, superimposed on Supreme Self or Brahma due to error of judgment and avidyā of jīva. Śaṅkara devoted his introduction of Brahma-sūtrabhāṣya to the thought of adhyāsa to account for illusory perception in the sense of mistaken ascription to something of an essential nature or attribute not belonging to it. It is an apparent presentation in the form of remembrance to consciousness something previously observed in some other thing. It is the illusory attribution of universe in Brahma. This notion is caused by avidyā. And it is on account of avidyā or ajñāna of true nature of Self or Brahma, we mistakenly identify real Self (Ātmā) with unreal not self (anātmā) or mindbody complex and we are steeped in lokavyāvahāra. It is natural procedure on the part of the human being that is engaged in the act of superimposition. Non duality is the final truth, that reality in its true nature can be realized by the eradication of avidya or by knowledge of discrimination, solely by putting an end superimposition of all the attribute that it does not possess. That causes nondual identification of Jiva with Brahma, synonymous with mokṣa. That's the reason adhyāsa become central pillar of Śaṅkara Advaita. According to Satchidanandendra saraswati for Śaṅkara avidyā is only a technical name to denote the natural tendency of human mind.³ and this method of teaching is met with throughout the Upaniṣad we know from the text 'that which has no plurality is communicated through false attribution followed by retraction'.⁴ Peculiarity of advaitic teaching is that it not only introduced the avidyā as an ontological device to link changeless one to the changing manifold but Śaṅkara also articulated the deep sleep state of jīva as unmanifested state of name and form sometime he named it as Īśvara, the material and efficient cause of the universe making the universe sentient and self aware⁵ lest that immutable nature of Brahma may be tainted by the impurity of avidyā. Where other schools of Vedānta did not face the problem as they were not biased on their speculation that Brahma is immutable. The later tradition diverged from Śaṅkara by turning avidyā into metaphysical principle namely mulāvidyā or māyā which is the primal material cause of the universe, thereby setting aside Śaṅkara's unevolved name

and form as the explanation for existence of materiality.⁶ I think avidyā, adhyāsa māyā all are alike in the sense that all are technical name of a communicating device intended to explain the multiplicity and mutation of the world to link changeless one Supreme Reality to the changing world and Individual Self. It is interesting to see the concept of māyā has been introduced in this system through the process of postulation, the chief weapon to establish the existence of avidyā as argued by prakāśananda. It is a mode of cognition in which it is assumed to account for the world of experience, another phenomena which is otherwise inexplicable⁷ that is to say when a known phenomena cannot be accounted for without another phenomena we have to postulate latter. Their view is that sole possible way of metaphysical explanation of phenomenal world is with the assistance of a characteristics, different from real and unreal and It is in this sense common world of experience cannot be rejected out of hand as totally false like sky flower nor can it taken to be totally real because it suffers contradiction when spiritual illumination takes place we realize what really was there all the time was only Brahma, world is mere illusion.

Ontological status of avidyā: First problem with core of Śaṅkara's philosophy is that status of avidyā which is source of manifold world or māyā which Śaṅkara and followers claim could not exists. As Brahma is nature of knowledge it cannot exist in Brahma then it will be presumed to be as real as Brahma and can never be contradicted. Nonetheless since Brahma is source of everything avidyā cannot exists apart from Brahma either. Śaṅkara of course from the very outset implicitly in his Adhāsabhāsyā and another sect diverged from Śaṅkara add up a new way of escaping from this difficulty proclaiming that jīva is āśraya of avidyā and relation of jīva and avidyā is beginningless from the time immemorial referring to the causal interdependence of seed (bīja) and sprout (aṅkura). Because if it had had not so hypothesized they had to fall into the clutches of fallacy of mutual dependencey(ananyāśrayadoṣa), as according to them jīva also much the same is creation of avidyā and non different from Brahma⁸. Question is now arise precisely, if jīva is beginningless then it cannot be different from Brahman in all level of existence as Brahman is only reality and jīva is identical with Brahma. But this is not the case because jīva is according to Śaṅkara nothing else but Brahma limited by mind body adjunct as such it is illogical to say that there is an un-originated soul which has as its ingredient an originated adjunct as well. Therefore jīva must have beginning unless we have to accept, it is a separate entity than that of Brahman, which is contradictory to Advaitic position and it would be an affront to the verdict of Upaniṣad which clearly describes, in the beginning before creation there was only Existence, one without a second.⁹ The analogy of seed and sprout has not also been legitimately applied here. The existence of the seed and the sprout along with their difference is, however known through perception, an important condition that determines the logical character of an unending mutual causality between two entities but in Vācaspati's philosophy, neither the jīva nor the avidyā nor their difference is cognized by any of the certified instruments of cognition.¹⁰ Many other pertinent question can be assorted forth like, does the Advaitin mean to say by the analogy of the seed and the sprout that the avidyās which condition the jīva, have the latter for their locus? or does he mean to

say that the earlier avidyās residing in the earlier jīvas condition the subsequent jīvas ? If it be the former, the analogy of the seed and the sprout does not apply at all to the present issue. Because sprout brought forth by a seed cannot itself be the locus of that seed.¹¹ If the avidyās of the previous jīvas produce the later jīvas then the jīvas would be destructible and such a position would conflict with the scriptural texts which describe that jīvas are eternal and indestructible. Vācaspati simply ended this debate on the statement that the relation of jīva and the avidyā is unintelligible, which is sign of Vācaspati's weakness and displeasing explanation of Śaṅkara's Vedānta, because it would be illogical to explain relation of jīva and avidyā in phenomenal order of existence as unintelligible.

Nature of māyā: Another point that needs to be elucidated in this context is Advaitic conceptualization on nature of māyā. Since according to the basic position of this system Brahma is only reality the principle of māyā as second to Brahma creates a crucial problem in Advaita philosophy. That is why māyā has been described by them as inscrutable power. Advaitic logic is hinged upon two basic values sat and asat. Śaṅkara upholds the criterion of 'sat' as that which is not contradicted either in past, present and future¹² and nature of asat is Madhusūdana Saraswatī says absolute nonexistent, which is denied for all time – past, present, future in such a way that it never be appreciated as something identifiable with an existent in any substratum whatsoever.¹³ On the ground of this Śaṅkarite goes on to contend that māyā cannot be defined as either sat because it disappears with the onset of Brahmajñāna, since it is experienced in the form 'I am ignorant of this or that' it is not unreal like hare's horn, nor can it be defined as sat and asat simultaneously (sadasat), since where they are treated as contradictory cannot co exists. So they added the third value that is sadasadvilakṣana, conjunction of sadvilakṣana and asadvilakṣana, meaning of which is neither sat nor asat. Let us examine now that is this definition fits in advaitic conceptual framework or not? sat is negation of asat and asat is negation of sat. If the words 'sat' and 'asat' are treated as contraries then the statement 'sadasadvilakṣana' admits third entity. Just as white is negation of black but 'not black' does not necessarily denote the colour white, it may admit other colours also as white and black do not exhaust all colours. In the same way if Brahman is said to be 'sat' in the sense that it is not 'asat' and 'asat' is used here as contrary of 'sat' then they admit third entity and Brahma is 'not asat' will be tantamount to saying that it is neither sat nor asat as the 'not asat' does not necessarily make it 'sat'.¹⁴ That being the case the philosophy of Śaṅkara will automatically loss their ground and notion of māyā as sadasadvilakṣana will be admitted as another reality indeed not as mithyā. Contrariwise if 'asat' is applied as contradictory of 'sat' that is, 'sat' and 'asat' are mutually exclusive then the statement 'sadasat' is contradictory in term and which is the criterion of falsity and 'sadasadvilakṣana' seems like we can conceive of as simply negation of self contradiction and that can be conceived as criterion of truth and it is proved absolute by the face that either in endeavouring to or doubt it we tacitly assume its validity.¹⁵ It is out of such an approach the reality of world can be ascertained and Brahma can be claimed to be graspable in thought and language. Therefore sadasadvilakṣana is meaningless combination of words, in either case it leads to a dilemma. Only the statement "sadvilakṣana ca

asadvilakṣana” (sad ca asad dvaya vilakṣana) is meaningful, which means neither sat and neither asat or it can be well defined as sadvilakṣana or asadvilakṣana, almost in a strain of Madhusūdāna author of Advaita siddhi where he is found to argue while defining the bhāvarūpatva of avidyā, what he really did mean by bhāvarūpa is nothing but different from negation or abhāvavilakṣanamātra, not actually position¹⁶. Meaning of which also is neither sat nor asat and does conform to the advaitic logic and intelligible to us.

Status of the world: The status of world become more significant in Advaitic hand when they made an attempt to connect the various loose ends of their philosophy into a system by taking resort to doctrine of three level of reality using sublation and endurance as the ontological criterion¹⁷ and their theory of causation especially the theory of vivarta vāda in post Śaṅkara era. Padmapāda (820AD) a almost contemporary of Āchārya Śaṅkara emphasizes on vivartavāda. According to the theory world is not total transformation in realistic sense of the milk into card. Rather it is vivarta or is a mere appearance of Brahma means seeming but not actual modification, as it is the case with regard to the appearance of water in to bubble, waves etc. For them Brahma is the ‘non self transforming material cause’ where as māyā is ‘self transforming material cause’. The ‘non self transforming’ is used to make clear, effect and cause have different level of reality and self transforming material cause implies there is same level of reality that is mithyā or anirvacanīya.¹⁸ So according to Śaṅkara world is not real as Brahma on the other hand it is not equated with the state of dream or prātibhāsika sattā because it serves our practical purposes and need and lasts until the realization of Brahma takes place,¹⁹ though in the minor work entitled Daśāśloki Śaṅkara is found to define jagat as tuccha or similar to fiction.²⁰ In my view point it would not be preposterous to put my point forth as such when they already explained away the jagat as a parināma of māyā then Brahmavivartavāda they propounded is nothing but mere exaggeration in their metaphysical framework, as it does not accept an effect at all that has got to be accounted for. Is not mere presence of Brahma as ground of everything sufficient to account for parināma of māyā? If it be held that Brahman itself causes the manifestation of avidyā then Brahman being eternal, the appearance of avidyā too would be eternal or if it is said avidyā manifest itself without an object then it would be self sufficient and eternal like Brahma. With the strain of Prakāśananda this can be justified to say, it is nothing but terrible mistake of limiting Brahma somehow in the context of Advaitic thought. Because being an appearance if it is admitted to be as different from Brahma then that would be to limit Brahma per se, as according to Śaṅkara Brahma is nondual, one, there is nothing different from it. Assumption that, appearance is non different from Brahma then that one would also be as real as Brahma overly. Concurrently I think their very classification of reality pāramārthika, vyāvahārika and prātibhāsik²¹ is logically untenable because if prātibhāsika sattā is contradicted by vyāvahārika sattā and as belief in the vyāvahārika sattā is to be discarded on the dawn of the higher knowledge then vyāvahārika sattā also in a way prātibhāsika and happens to be contradictory whether within very short time or later. Their rejoinder that jagat is real because it serves the practical purposes is groundless also because illusion and dream equally can serve practical purpose. A dream

can impaired the actual physical organs and illusion of snake in rope can cause fear. Moreover dream experience and illusion is matter of personal experience and also contradicted by the persons experience. Denial of one experience by another experience does not imply that sublated experience is of lesser degrees of value than sublating experience, because both are cognition per se and real. Dṛiṣṭisṛiṣṭivādi also vehemently attack the level of reality on the ground that the distinction between vyāvahārika and prātibhāsika sattā not justified because objective world has no existence apart from subjective perception. Since world become absolutely zero apart from Brahma, the so called vyāvahārika sattā thus become nothing but fiction of imagination.²² They ultimately meet at a point to be freed from inner conflict, that is in their presupposition of the pāramārthika sattā, and only on the realization of this sattā world's extempore reality can be contradicted. As the concern of the upaniṣadic thinking is to communicate to sincere enquirers direct experience of the Supreme Reality as their own self, it is admitted by all schools of Advaita that the final psychosis called intuition is the only method through which we can comprehend reality or Brahman and they go on to contend, luminosity of the intelligence associated with the final psychosis of the nature of the impartite while rooting out the entire universe is capable of removing the psychosis as well, considering that psychosis itself is creation of māyā. They justify their stand on the analogy of fire associated with a faggot, while burning up villages, cities etc., burns up that faggot too.²³ In view of such preposterous conclusion the validity of Śaṅkarites contention which is self contradictory should be execrated. Because the behavior of the jīvanmukta is a proof of the persistence of world of which psychosis is a parts even after the dawn of final psychosis proves that avidyā is not annulled at all. Even their contention of prārabdha-karma, caused by trace of avidyā and which is claimed to be the impediments (pratibandhena) in total annihilation does not necessarily validate causality of knowledge in the removal of the mere ignorance²⁴. Because their belief that two kinds of karma, called sañcita and āgāmi, always disappear totally upon attaining mokṣa while only one kind of karma the prārabdhakarma still remains to be experienced and that is destructible by enjoyment then it is not false because according to Advaitin which is false is destroyable by knowledge of Brahman .Then they has to assert another reality than that of Brahma. Moreover if such liberated souls or jīvanmukta continue to retain their bodies in this world to work out his prārabdhakarma or may even he move on to other bodies like a jātismara till their missions are accomplished then they will never be able to attain absolute liberation. Because he has to work in the whole course of the world, whether it is good karma or bad karma and consequently will have to take birth repeatedly to enjoy its fruits for eternity.

Problem of liberation: Over and above many pertinent questions has been repeatedly posed with regard to the Advaitic conception of mokṣa, when they claim real nature of individual soul is identical with Brahma free from impurities, eternal, beyond mind body adjunct, effulgent bliss yet, on account of avidyā it is subjected to bondage and defilement consequently sufferings. Accordingly emancipation is nothing exceeding to removal of avidyā, that instantaneously reveals the true self. While interpreting the upaniṣadic

mahāvākya aham Brahmāsmi²⁵ tat tvam asi²⁶ Śaṅkara maintains that there is unqualified identity between the individual self and Brahma in fact what he really means here is that soul views apart from the conditions which differentiate it from Pure Consciousness is identical with Pure Consciousness. To me this identity cannot be thoughtfully grasped. Moreover this upaniṣadic statements are glaring instances of non identity as well because he was yet not purged of his sense of I and mine at the moment of feeling, it was under bondage in some or other way. I think by absolute identity what they mean with regard to this is nothing beyond than that of pure level of antaḥkaraṇavṛitti while living in the body. Furthermore it must be call attention to in question, who has no prior knowledge of Brahma at all how could he say that he is Brahma at the state of feeling of identity. Who has not realized Brahma how could he know what it is. He cannot be taught by anyone who has realized Brahma, because who realized it is unable to teach anyone what it is. Because he should be lost of word, wordless, voiceless, silent, be in a state of tranquility at that very moment, a state from which there is no return journey to this world.

Conclusion: I have tried to give so far an extensive view of some aspects of philosophy of Śaṅkara would to a great extent vouchsafe the truth of the conviction that its metaphysics is not most satisfying to the human intellect. In fact it appears to me so it was only on the basis of the analogy of the individual self and its relationship with the mental state that Śaṅkara conceived of the relationship between Brahma and jagat, as well as he had to imagine what kind of being Brahma must be. As such he was more concern about the characteristic of self consciousness such as we experience in our cognitive experience than in working out in detail status of the commonsense world and its relationship with Brahman because he knew it was an impossible task and leave it aside with the digression simply by the major term ‘anirvacanīya’. Moreover through and through Śaṅkarites used the various conjectures as well as analogy with regard to the nature of world and to conceive of nature of ultimate reality, are not in accordance with sound preliminary knowledge or intuition or justifying an intelligent guess and from this, jump to the proposition about nondual ultimate reality is to make a foolish and illegitimate demand on fact. As a result, it ends up providing close to the worse possible explanation of our experience and this problem should put to an end with common assertion that his thesis “Brahma satya Jagat mithyā jīva Brahmaiva na paraḥ” is no more than a bizarre fantasy. It is significant in this context to note and would be the correct appraisal of Advaitic philosophy of admitting this fact that, Advaitic method of teaching seems to be can best well be taken as an exemplification of application of the Karl Popper’s scientific theory²⁷ in proving the reality of world that is, by trending the path of falsification it has indirectly proved the reality of the world indeed

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