

Concept of Reality in Advaita Vedanta with special reference to Western Philosophy

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Abstract: Human mind proceeded to think on the subtle at the root of the gross objects. This led to the rise of numerous questions in its mind. Just as several questions arose in the human mind with regards to the deep and extremely subtle form of the external world and the inner world. Philosophy means thinking about the universe. Since the dawn of civilization, men in Different times and different climes have tried to find out what the universe was, what was its origin and destiny. It is hard to grasp the nature of self or Brahman of Samkara philosophy. Self is existence, consciousness and bliss-Sat, Cit, Ananda. Self is not an object possessing these qualities. It is an undifferentiated homogeneous entity. But by saying that consciousness is the only reality, we do not give a description of it as such and such, we simply make a referring statement. Acceptance of the rule of unoblatability is a necessary condition of the functioning of the system.

Key Words: Bliss, Sat, Cit, Ananda, Consciousness, Brahman, Susupti

1. INTRODUCTION:

Philosophy means thinking about the universe. Since the dawn of civilization, men in Different times and different climes have tried to find out what the universe was, what was its origin and destiny. What is the ultimate reality of the world is the root question and all philosophers and philosophies have attempted to give the so called final answer. The result of these deliberations has given rise to number of theories that have taken the form of different philosophical schools. The answer given by the different schools of thought are at considerable variance from each other, sometimes even contradictory, and the mystery has only deepened rather than getting resolved.

1.1. CONCEPT OF REALITY IN PHILOSOPHY::

Human mind proceeded to think on the subtle at the root of the gross objects. This led to the rise of numerous questions in its mind. Just as several questions arose in the human mind with regards to the deep and extremely subtle form of the external world and the inner world. The rise of these questions is precisely the first step to the birth of philosophy. It is a fact that philosophers of different schools have been confronted with the problem of reality. In all the ages, beginning from the period of ancient philosophers like Heraclitus, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle up to the period of modern philosophers, thinking process has been directed in search for reality, the ultimate underlying principle. A little philosophical reflection shows that search for reality is the inner urge of man.

2. IDEALISM AND REALISM:

Metaphysics dealing with theories of reality is undoubtedly a successful attempt to give solution to the central problem of philosophy. Pluralism, Dualism and monism are various names for several theories of reality and accordingly world of diversities is sometimes taken to be real, or matter and mind are regarded as two ultimate principles or, the reality is one. The entire metaphysical world is divided into Idealism and realism. These two advocate two opposite views regarding the nature of reality. If we want to study the essential features of philosophy, we will have to have established a close contact with the main trends of Idealism and Realism. Without a comprehensive and systematic study of these two isms, we cannot grasp the essence of philosophy. The difference between these two currents is not so much in their goal as in their presuppositions and methods of approach. Idealism believes only in ideas. As per Idealism the mind only determines the objects and does not create them, determination and creation are two different things. There have been different Idealistic views in western and Indian philosophies as follows: Idealism of Plato, Berkeley, Kant, Bradley, Madhyamika school of Buddhism and Yogacara school of Buddhism. Idealism is the belief or doctrine according to which thought is the medium of the self expression of reality. In other words reality is such as much necessarily express itself through the ideal or ideals that are organic to the knower's intellectual equipment which may be called thought or reason.

The Realism school takes into consideration the phenomenal world to be real. The general conception of Realism is that whatever is, is real in the sense that it exists and functions independently of any mind and its interference whatsoever. In Western philosophy, as we find, the first Greek philosophers were realists making either

water or air or fire to be the ultimate principle of the world existing independently of the mind, and the world with all its complex contents was supposed to owe its origin and growth to this principle. Realists do not regard only one reality as valid. They establish the theory of the reality of physical objects independent of and entirely different from any mind, intellect, experience, consciousness, individual or spirit. Consciousness is different from its object. The nature of consciousness is quite different from the nature of material objects. There have been different Realism views is Western and Eastern philosophies as follows:- Monistic Realism, Dualistic Realism, Pluralistic Realism, Pragmatic view of Realism ,Neo-Realism, critical Realism, Generative Realism, Purva Mimamsa, Samkhya realism, carvak Realism, Jaina Realism ,Vaibhasika and sauntranika school of Realism.

3. ADVAITA CONCEPTION OF REALITY:

The Advaita conception of Reality is borrowed from Upanishads. Samkaracharya is an exponent of Non-dualism. To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan "It is impossible to read Samkara'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...."2 "Ultimate Reality, according to Sankara, is Atman or Brahman which is pure consciousness (jnana-svarupa) or consciousness of Pure Self (Svarupa jnana), which is devoid of all attributes (nirguna) and all categories of intellect (nirvishes)."3 Brahman is the only reality without a second i.e., it is non-dual. Hence the name of the system "Advaita Vada or Non-Dualism is justified. According to this great philosopher, all that language attributes to reality does not belong to it. Samkara's pursuit of reality is based on logical method. Prof. G. Mishra in his book Analytical studies in Indian Philosophical problems propounded that "Samkara most clearly and unmistakably term declares that logical consideration alone finally and conclusively proves that Brahman alone is real and that world of multiplicity created and fostered by names and forms is unreal and unacceptable."4 It is hard to grasp the nature of self or Brahman of Samkara philosophy. Self is existence, consciousness and bliss—Sat, Cit, Ananda. Self is not an object possessing these qualities. It is an undifferentiated homogeneous entity. The attributes point to the nature of self. Existence, Consciousness and Bliss distinguish self from everything else in the world. Existence is the essential nature of the absolute. It is not the appearance of reality nor a species of it. Real is existent in the sense that it is not non-existent. i.e., it cannot be negated. that which is negated has some determinations—spatial, temporal or in content reality is free from such determinations. The objects of the world are subject to change and destruction and therefore can never be real. Five characteristics belong to every object of experience. Of these five characteristics viz, Existence, Manifestation, Lovability, name and form, the former three constitute the essential nature of Brahman, whereas the last two are associated with the visible objects of the world. Nama, rupa vary from object to object and in this context, objects of first view can be rejected as unreal objects. These objects are due to Maya.

By an analysis of the internal world, one arrives at the same conclusion that existence is the only reality without a second and it is the ground of experience. The self remains constant in three different stages of experience. Thus self-revelation does never disappear in any one of three states. It remains unchangeable throughout various changes. Self-existence can never be doubted. Here this will refer to the western philosopher Descartes only to point out the indubitability of the self. Rene Descartes, the modern Western philosopher, established his philosophy on the method of doubting. But his doubt was initial. It was a method to arrive at a conclusion. Descartes doubted everything, but he could not doubt the act of doubting." Cogito Ergo Sum" or "I think therefore I am" was the fundamental postulate for him.5 Thus, he proved the existence of 'I'. Regarding the notion of 'Self' Descartes undoubtedly differs from Samkara, but an instance of his philosophical method points to the truth of the proposition "Existence of self can never be doubted" in the best possible way. Mundakya Upanisad like all other Upanisads deals with the problem of reality. It goes straight to the philosophical discussion of reality.6 Philosophy of Mandukya Karika written by Gaudapada has great resemblances with Advaita Philosophy of Samkara. In Gaudapada's opinion the non-dual Atman is not a theological dogma but a philosophical truth. Samkara's commentary draws our attention to the same fact with more vividness. The waking and dream states have two common characteristics namely 'non-apprehension of reality' and 'mis-apprehension of reality'. Susupti is distinguished from the two states only in the sense that the second feature is absent here. Yet, there is non-apprehension of reality can not be equal to knowledge of reality. These three states are manifested and the nature of the unmanifested is not realised during these states. On logical ground for the realisation of the unmanifested Brahman fourth state is a necessity. Waking experience is sublated by dream-experience and dream experience by the causal state. Here, one is bound to think of another state where all the three states will become one. Thus, fourth state is a logical consequence. This is Turiya. It is not a state at all. Only for the sake of explanation, Turiya is regarded as the fourth. Turiya is pure Atman or consciousness. Samkara, in his commentary states that the manifold is non-different from Brahman, as the wave is non-different from water. The idea in dream states are nothing but Brahman. It has been previously stated that Turiya is not Viswa, not Taijasa, not pranjna, yet it is present in these three states.7 The cognition, 'I am that' in the waking state suggests that 'I' who has been perceiving objects now, had seen ideas in dream and experienced nothing in deep sleep remains the same. There is nothing to suggest that the experience of the three states are not identical. Illustration of the great fish from

Brihadaranyaka Upanisads can be stated here to explain atman. As a powerful fish swims from one bank to another, unaffected by the currents of river, so also, Atman moves in three states totally unaffected by them it is pure and unrelated.

To make his metaphysical doctrine of non-dual consciousness well-founded Samkara lays down a criterion of Reality. That the consciousness of which is sublated is unreal and the consciousness of which does not change is real. On this ground, he declares the world of manifold objects and fleeting ideas to be unreal. What is real in all these changeable objects is mere existence. Existence is the substratum on which the unreal objects with their attributes are superimposed. So existence is that which is never sublated, never contradicted which is the only Reality ,the pure consciousness. Thus Samkar has taken a daring step to give a new definition and a new criterion of Reality. This criterion is the criterion of un-sublatability or non-contradiction i.e., the criterion of Abadha. With reference to the masterpiece, Mandukyakarika the same truth can be established. In this it has been clearly shown, how waking state is sublated by dream, dream state by susupti and susupti by Turiya, which is never sublated. It is the only Sat, the imperishable or avinashi. Regarding the nature of Reality, the famous western philosopher, F.H. Bradley seems to follow a similar, though not identical line of thought regarding the nature of Reality. Bradley declares the world of objects to be mere appearance. He believes strongly that ' Truth lay elsewhere'. In addition, he writes" Ultimate Reality is such that it does not contradict itself; here is an absolute criterion"8 Bosanquet the renowned logician, advocates a similar theory regarding the criterion of reality. For him, the principle of non-contradiction is a positive and constructive principle.

4. CONCLUSION:

Samkara, in adhyaya II, pada I, 12th sutra of his commentary on Brahmasutra clearly points out that in cases of ordinary language whatever thing is permanently of one and the same nature is acknowledged to be real thing, "Fire is hot" is an illuminating example. There cannot be fire without heat. Therefore in ordinary usage the knowledge of fire as hot is regarded as true knowledge (samyak jnana). But when it is subject to further analysis, this also will not stand to test. Basing on this ordinary linguistic usage, Samkara is proposing a new linguistic structure by putting forward 'unsublatability' as the criterion of Reality. From this it follows that non-dual pure consciousness is the only reality. But by saying that consciousness is the only reality, we do not give a description of it as such and such, we simply make a referring statement. Acceptance of the rule of unsublatability is a necessary condition of the functioning of the system.

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