

AN INTEGRAL THEORY ON REALITY

Dr. N. USHADEVI,
M. A. (VEDANTA), M.A. PHILOSOPHY, Ph. D.,
SELECTION GRADE LECTURER,
SREE SANKARA COLLEGE, KALADY.

To substantiate and expedite the scepticism in elucidating the disparities in the scheme of interpretations on Reality it requires a clear understanding of the implications of the truth-conditions that does never undermine the peculiar meaning of Reality. A distinctive feature of such an effort is that it clearly must demarcate the Reality from any causal relation so as to render a meaningful and perspicuous conceptualization about the un-resolvable puzzle-the 'Being' The necessary concomitance in ascertaining a framework for Reality is undoubtedly the inferential process that is based on scholastic

interpretations and an inquisitive approach. Varied experiences on the puzzles have brought forth different conceptualizations such as monism, dualism, atheism and the like. The apparent reconstructions proposed through several predispositions are surely not deterministic as they are relevant at the empirical level only. It is remarkable that in Advaita Vedānta there is an assertive proposition on Reality that nevertheless will be subjected to any contradictoriness. As a most plausible exposition it asserts that oneness of Being as universality in all its real as well as phenomenal states renders a logical stability and capability to the notion of non-distinctness within It. Thus it helps to substantiate the illuminating notion on identity between the Reality and all the universal elements. In such a context, it is very significant to review the advaitic notion on Reality in which any evidence on Reality becomes subsumed in that. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore and examine an integral proposition on Reality and certain issues related therewith.

The primary aim of Advaita Vedānta is to explicate the concept of non-dualism and to convey invariably that proposition to the mankind through empirical experience which prima facie sustains the notion of correlation between unity and universal. It is the essential unity of the multifarious universe that never destroys differences in totality, but in fact means a subjugation of something that is finite. The Real is in its absolute sense infinite and is always far from propositions of quantification or determination. The problem of determinism or abstraction requires cognition of the true sense of

totality or the One without a second, which in an individualistic approach (because of individuality itself) makes a sense of difference in the proposition of unity thereby. The fundamental notion of Advaita hardly has any justification of identity in difference in the Reality, for, the indefinable limitations being the correlative connotation for such an explication of identity in difference does create hindrances in such efforts. However, Reality in the sense of affirmation has to correspond to the perspective of identity-in-difference that does never be the absolute, for, affirmation requires a definable proposition which the Reality cannot be. This necessarily forwards the problem of possibility/impossibility of cognition of the Absolute principle. Such indispensable distinctions related to this dichotomy raises crucial problems such as:

The supposed differences between the two divisions of reality the Para and Aparā.

The distinctiveness of Avidyā as a verification for judgement.

The correct status and the locus of avidyā/māyā/false knowledge.

The experience of the Absolute from the empirical point of view (identity in difference).

Possibility/impossibility of direct cognizance of the Reality.

Freedom and its verification

The Advaitins, including Śaṅkara, in their elucidation of the propositions on the Absolute Reality (Para Brahman) have adopted the upaniṣadic techniques of negative dialectics through which the unity in the Absolute is also called for. But the category of '*prima facie*' and '*limitation*' inevitably functioning in the same One is questionable. Whether the distinction is exactly a division of the Reality is answered in negative terms, otherwise two levels of Reality in Advaita posits a serious threat to the *prima facie* essence. As against this, if distinction in the Reality is conceptualized as having a different unity of second-less infinite, the necessity and possibility of the Absolute gets clarified. This view is attempted in the following discussion. For Advaita, the unity of existence in the ultimate is peculiar to itself with an internal unidentifiable distinction. It calls the two distinctions as *poises-para* and *apara*. Instead of categorizing this unity in a distinctive manner, it has to be positively indicated and asserted as the second-less infinite principle. The unique conceptualization of the Reality as Śakti in its passivity can be deduced to the Advaitic notion of the essence rather than a combination of *poises* of aspect and essence for the same Reality. This brings out the denial of any limitation in its essence and therefore impossibility of complete oneness in the empirical realm of existence. Just as unity of proposition as experienceable in the empirical level explicates a categorization in the form of essence as well existence(as mental

mode), this unity that has definable element as bliss cannot be claimed as absolute. For, its relativity to the body-mind complex without which experience is not possible, denies unity or absolute oneness to such a Reality.

The theory of Abhedānubhava or Integral experience of the Reality is the subject matter of the article presented here.

Let us now discuss the above said problems within the context of Advaita Vedānta.

Reality and Categorization

A deeper penetration into the central doctrine of Advaita Vedānta pertaining to the most fundamental and prima facie level of existence explicitly brings forth the notion of Absolute- 'Advaitam'. It is the 'independent', universal essence, infinite and without a second. A closer examination of 'prima facie' notion reveals two distinctive levels of categories in Reality-one the Absolute real (Para) and the other the categorical imperative expressed as universally justified (Apara).¹ The totality factor denies absolute reality to the apara. It would be illuminating to mention here the problem arising out of the distinctiveness of the reality as aspect and essence. It is agreed upon by all that the essence always stands above the aspects, if otherwise it has to be accepted that body is higher than the life - principle. In the case of Brahman as having two poises of the same (identity-in-

difference), the essence is the Śakti and therefore, it must be the Absolute. The passivity of the Śakti asserts this fact. The Advaitins contend that Śakti is Māya or illusory power that hides Brahman from cognition at empirical level.² The totality in the usage of the term ‘Brahman’ (Bṛhat) denies any aspect-essence categorization and hence Śakti is nothing other than Brahman the essence of all. Neglecting this true meaning of Brahman, the Advaitins put forward a correspondence between these two categories. A sharp disagreement on this Advaitic view is explicated by the fact of inseparability of Brahman as essence and aspect which does never has dichotomy of any sort. What justification or proof can one give in favor of Brahman where there is nothing else? It is very important to discuss about freedom and its determinism in this context. There is no doubt, however, that most of the Advaitic thinkers believe that the goal of every individual is to have this freedom and enjoy it which substantively is impossible as nothing else than Brahman exists to enjoy. It is meaningful here to understand that it is the expressed (self-manifested) notion that is the termination of the cognition. Therefore Brahman is the non cognitive but indicated something. ‘Śakti’, the conscious un-manifested, infinite proposition is Brahman itself. Owing to the fact that such an ‘Absolute’ (without contents) can correspond better to ‘sūnyata’ of Buddhist thinkers, such an Absolute Brahman is indeed denied by the Advaitic exponents. There is no need for having any correspondence between these two opposite propositions as

Absoluteness is 'sūnyata' in the sense that nothing else than Brahman exists to know It. Further sūnyata is indicative of the boundlessness that justifies the proposition of Brahman. The absence of descriptive element for Brahman serves the purpose of sūnyata. The upanisadic statements such as 'Neti, neti',³ 'Asadvā idamagra āsit'⁴ and the like in evaluative terms means expression of notions of such an Absolute non-cognitive Brahman. The unilateral views regarding possibility of cognition of the Absolute express their empirically based judgments without looking in to the real contexts of their uses. These thinkers, in so far as the empirical experience is concerned, forget that the propositions will become meaningful only when they are far from dichotomy. Also a search for reality should end in empirical experience, if the presentations in cognition are essentially the highest. This is not the observed case, the search continues and is terminated at the end of the life-cycle only. The basic prejudice is that the Advaitins are thinking about only one but at the same time envisage a self-made distinction. Hence it is perfectly legitimate to think that categorization is not the purport of Reality but an instinctive proposition within It.

Reality-the Śakti, Brahman

In the background of discarding the substantive categorization of Reality and confining it exclusively to 'One' (Ekam) it has to prove the point-the justification for the true nature of 'One'. The fact is that empirical experiences present an attributed Real indicating another Absolute-infinite, non-descriptive proposition. This is necessarily the

'Śakti', the conscious something without distinctions in its potentiality, that is the essence of all. It is perfectly legitimate to call it 'Brahman' as its correct usage-'Bṛhat' (vast) and 'Bṛmhaṇa' (expanding) presuppose the existence of It as the highest being . In its evaluative context it may be either 'śūnyata' or boundlessness. The actual act of knowing It means 'unempiricality' or cessation of phenomenal existence that points to the impossibility of cognition. It is the Self-manifest being, 'Self-manifestness being indefinable', that is the possible Reality in cognizance making It expressed or subject to categorization. There were concerted attempts to reinterpret the notion on Brahman by Advaitins like Sarvajñātman who allows cognition to be that of this manifested one (Pratyagātman) whereas the highest is conceived non-cognizable⁵ The justification for the Reality as Śakti comes to one's common experience wherein, for example, the air (a manifested form of Śakti) cannot be felt in its motionless state; but when it moves, there is a felt experience, the mover being nothing else than itself. Although Śāṅkara distances himself from such a controversial argument, he could not escape from the basic incompatibility of the doctrine of identity in difference. This is reflected in the introduction of the Māyāvāda from his part. The incommensurability of Māya in attaining final freedom discloses this reciprocal independence. Śāṅkara calls this incomprehensiveness as 'anirvacanīyam'. Though the latter seems to be a right proposition,

the notion of presumed identity with the highest is only an arbitrary fact, as it cannot be experienceable or known in empirical existence.

The argument in favor of in-definability centers around the certainty of non-cognizability of the highest . This undoubtedly leads to the conclusion that the highest principle is un-manifested and is the ‘Śakti’—Sakyate anayā iti Śaktiḥ. ‘Bereft of Śakti Brahman of Advaita cannot work’, simply affirms the supremacy of the Śakti. However, this analysis may not be satisfactory for the Advaitins because according to them, it is pointless to speak about Śakti with out Brahman-the mover; even Śakti is moved by Brahman and therefore it is not proper to think of the supremacy of Śakti over Brahman . But the challenge of identity in difference as well the assigning of the locus of Avidya in Brahman is against the true purport of the absoluteness in Advaita philosophy and hence Śakti, the consciousness, demands higher subjective corroboration. This is also ascertained based on:

- a) the application of the theory of experience and
- b) need for a continuous contemplation (Tapas) after the experience or cognition. This fact is valuable enough to resolve the dilemma of the locus of avidyā and the ‘sūnyatā’ of cognition.

Verification of Judgments-Avidyā/Māya

One very important aspect of ‘our experience’ is that it is the objective basis of the description of the meaning of facts or it is a

judgment from empirical standpoint. But these judgments have no reason behind them and may be said to be true or false from the absolute viewpoint. The search for the truthfulness of the facts is venturing into the common essence of all, the Reality. It is to be recognized that these judgments are to be factually verifiable for the truthfulness. Experience reveals that reality is obscured to one's cognition. It is true that the subjectivity is wrongly and distinctively identified as objectivity. But this distinction is a question of reduction to objectivity and is a false notion on Reality. What makes this distinction possible? It is the absence of knowledge (Avidyā) that stands in the way of knowledge of Reality.

The fundamental query about the cause of distinction in the subjectivity cannot be explained on the basis of caused relations as it is the consciousness that is reduced to objectivity. This is called 'anirvacaniyam' by Śaṅkara because of difficulty in answering the reducibility in the purview of consciousness to cognition; cognition is normally believed to be a judgment for verification. But the inadequacy of the cognitive level to reach to the non-dual, unmanifested state of Being evinces impossibility of the cognition of Being in its wholeness as a result of Avidyā. The very first inadequacy in identifying the causal factor of distinctiveness is debated whether avidyā has its locus in the Absolute or in the Mind. Possibly for the Absolute there is no chance of any avidyā: but It is covered by avidyā, untouched by it. But it is understood that Absolute is described from the empirical

point of view that is in a possible cognitive experience. Cognitive experience is related to the body-mind complex. Hence it is contended that it is the 'Mind' that is the locus of avidyā. This is a significant proposition as the terms 'awareness' and 'consciousness' imply. Awareness is objective-whereas consciousness is subjective. Avidyā can be called Māya (illusion) in the sense that the mind causes illusions about the Reality. Śakti cannot be called avidyā as its in-definability and 'essence' nature is incommensurable with the non-dualism. So this brings a necessary methodological shift towards the concept of 'ŚAKTI' (un-manifested) as the highest. Much of the analysis demands a complete removal of mental afflictions (kṛśās) the immediacy of which is cognition of something that is devoid of causal connections. This has led to the inappropriate proposition of the Absolute from the part of Advaitins. It is to be recognized that this might very well be the experience of the experiencer from the phenomenal level. Therefore it is equally important to note that further contemplation is the only answer to the final identity and oneness. The Scriptures also point out such a conviction.⁶

Freedom and its Verification

In ascertaining the level of immediacy in experience, two questions need to be revisited-To whom does the Absolute appear? What is that which is experienced? It is known that Absolute itself can never appear in experience, unless there is self manifestation, and hence can never be subjected to change or any modification. That

which is experienced is the manifested one. Again, experience is related to existence which in turn means a determinative, spacio-temporal reference and is not applicable to the Absolute. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss of the cognitive experience, is deterministic and therefore belongs to a lower level of manifested state. Again, as Reality is a trans-mental phenomena one can be aware of accepting a new higher proposition that is beyond the cognitive experience as well as the body-mind complex. Further, the state of presence of experience of objectivity is never permanent whereas the realm of subjectivity is changeless. Hence there is no duality. This is the Śakti the non-dual that is Brahman itself.

Freedom and its Necessity

During the course of discussion on Reality it is said that the notion of Advaitam involves transformation of plurality of objective cognition of an individual to a unique 'oneness'. The unity-in-difference is also not justifiable in case of Reality. An individual's urge for freedom depends on his choice between the whole realm of reality and the conviction for availability of freedom in a unity of experience. Freedom lies, however, in the distinctive separation of the mental phenomenon and the influence of objectivity. Freedom is thus nothing but a measure of the quantity of objectivity associated with the mind. Judgments on Reality are the outcome of this measure. In a pure mind, devoid of objectivity, the revelation of the reality in the form of bliss is had and this is the experience of freedom from the

empirical standpoint. This is the highest cognition. But if the implication of this freedom is the ultimate, there is no necessity in continuity of further effort towards another level as a freed person never longs for objectivity. This satisfies the conditional freedom from the premises of social environment. The social necessity for an individual is the experience of the bliss of unity of mental experience and the manifested highest. But salvation is the ultimate oneness where nothing else other than Reality exists. It is 'Mukti'.

The Scientific Correspondence of the 'Śakti' Theory

Modern scientific formulations on the 'universality' are based on the circumstantial evidences. There is no distinction whatever so in the intrinsic feature of the reality as found by scientific expeditions. Observing the problems raised by the necessity of postulating Reality, scientists are now working for a unified theory on such a possibility. Scientific thinkers have postulated the universe as an aggregate of different forces-electromagnetic, gravitational and the quantum energy. Every constituent of the universe is theoretically proved to be made of this infinitesimal 'power' that influences the existence of the created things. Each constituent of the matter exists because of the balance of one or the other 'forces'. The two types of forces-the inwardly directed centripetal and the outwardly directed centrifugal forces keep the objects in their position. These different forces are not enough for deciphering the entire essence of the world phenomenon. Further investigations may pave the way for a unified theory on 'Śakti' as the

essence of all. Still the basic manifesting 'power'-the 'mover of the movable'-is unidentified. Whatever true of the possible reality of the forces is the level of manifestation and not the manifested as cognized by philosophers.

Concluding Remarks

An attempt is made in this paper to show that the 'Advaitic Reality' that is the domain of cognition is identity-in-difference whatever the unity or oneness is claimed by them. It is the presented Reality as against the unmanifest one. The experience of such a reality though gives what can be said as Abhedānubhava, it, to be proper, is not the Absolute. Such an integral experience does not terminate the mind, without which any anubhava (experience) is not possible. In order to establish the Absoluteness and impossibility of cognition of the absoluteness some arguments have been raised against the concepts such as identity-in-difference, locus of Avidyā, Śakti as avidyā/māya and freedom corresponding to Abhedānubhava. An examination of the criteria of the Absoluteness shows its non-cognizability and its being not the locus of Avidya. Since Reality is trans-mental subjectivity, the same is incommensurable to any of the states of cognitive experience Avidya cannot have its locus in the pure subjectivity. Avidyā works in the form of mental constructions (Vāsanās) and hence is specially localized in the mind. The distraction of all afflictions characteristically inherent in the mind due to its association and influence of objectivity results only in abhedānubhava

which is not the 'One' ness or complete identity. As such 'Śakti' the abiding principle and the essence of all as BRAHMAN itself and is in the state of potentiality in its absolute state. It manifests itself and gives to plurality. Freedom is the necessity of the social environment and it is the experience of 'oneness'. Lastly, the conceptualizations in science also prove the absoluteness of the 'Sakti' principle through a unified theory of various forces is not yet fully developed.

Notes & References

1. 'Dve vāva Brahmaṇo rūpe'. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. II, iii-1. Tadanupraviśya sacca Tyaccābhavat', Taittirīya Upaniṣad. 2.6.*
2. *Śāṅkarabhāṣya on Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. I. 3*
3. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, III. 9.26*
4. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad. 7.*
5. *Saṅkṣepaśārīrakam, I.173, 243.*
6. *Jñānaprasādena viśuddhasattvastatastu taṃ paśyate niṣkalaṃ dhyāyamānaḥ. Muṇḍakopaniṣat. III. i. 8.*