

## ADVAITA VEDĀNTA-A DIALECTICAL SPECTER OF THE UNCANNY

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Modernity is always marked by structural changes in thought process, its content and methodology of interpretations. Accordingly new thoughts and concepts will be put forward and subjected to reevaluations and interpretations in time. Sometimes such new theoretical propositional outcomes may end in dialectical disparities between the evolved and the original ones leading to complete uncanny interpretations by those who encounter the dilemma of thought within. In such situational contexts there is no way out to solve contemporary issues regarding the original philosophical obligations of man to realise the content and intent of our goal that is Reality. In such a critical context it is most essential to understand the challenges and tasks before the system of Advaita Vedānta explicated by the great Ācārya, Śrī Śaṅkara and an attempt has been made there to evaluate some of the uncanny dialectical criticisms against the system. Dialectics implies the inner contradictions in the thesis of the opponent and shows its absurdity with the help of the logic and with rules and procedures with the opponent himself accepts as valid. May be, theoretical propositions vary from person to person due to perceptual thinking; disputes and debates or disagreements are welcome but the fact that what the philosopher delivers has to be understood in a genuine manner. To begin with, let me discuss the statement: *Brahma satyam jagamthyā jīvo*

brahmaiva nāparaḥ (Brahman is Real, the world is false, and the individual self is none other than Brahman)

The point of deliberation has three contextual situations- Reality, unreality and non-differentiation. Reality is ever existent, inexpressible, infinite and without a second. About unreality Śaṅkara says that when Brahman is realised nothing remains to be known. Until then the world remains real. He also affirms that both Reality and unreality are incommensurable and nevertheless interpenetrate to a non dualistic vision. The point is not that there is disparity in thought about the reality or unreality of the world but it is whether such an expression of thought as quoted above about 'jaganmithyā' can be attributed to Śrī Śaṅkara? Modern Advaitic thinkers like Prof. Śrīnivāsa Rao strongly contends that Śaṅkara never uses the term 'mithyājagat'. Instead he uses words like 'mithyājñāna, mithyājñānakalpita, mithyājñānanimitta, mithyājñānavṛtti'. An analysis of Brahmasūtrabhāṣya of Śaṅkara can also bring in the rightness of this argument. The real intention of Śaṅkara in using the term 'mithya' is to describe 'wrong knowledge' regarding the true nature of Brahman. He does never speak of the unreality of the world.

What seems more appropriate here is to analyse the nature of the world. Śaṅkara holds that the world is characterised by 'jadatva'-insentience whereas that which is sentient is Brahman. In this sense, an attempt by some advaitic philosophers to consider 'māyā' (insentience) as the material cause of the world seems hardly acceptable. Śaṅkara traces the causality to Brahman only through self-manifestation, not to any other agency. So he calls the world as non-distinct from Brahman. The Upaniṣadic statements also have greater confirmance with this view. For Śaṅkara there is no such

completely insentient principle like *mūlaprakṛti* as is believed by the Sāṅkhyaans because everything is traceable to Brahman only.<sup>1</sup> But the only thing is that in the world Brahman remains in its unmanifest state. Brahman is all-pervasive and hence there is no completely insentient matter.

ii) The next point of contention is that: How does Brahman manifest and become the world that has opposite nature to Him? Or how can matter come into existence?

Śaṅkara says that Brahman manifesting into the world is 'anirvacanīya' (indescribable), as He is the only witness for any manifestation. Again, Non-duality does not permit any external agency for such an act. It is the inherent capacity, the power of Brahman that manifests into the universe. As this power is non-distinct from Brahman in His unmanifest state the *anirvacanīya* principle also holds good for this power. He calls this power *māyā* because it is responsible for the manifestation. *Māyā* has another function in the sense that it makes difficult the knowledge of Brahman to the created beings. Because of this indeterminate role it plays, it is referred to as *māyā*-illusion. Erroneous knowledge resulting in illusion is endowed with a subjective content according to all thinkers inclusive of realists as well as idealists. For realists the problem of *maya* is always a hard nut to crack. There is no satisfactory explanation for it. Their contention is that knowledge never misrepresents an object. How then can illusion about the object arise? Prabhākara calls illusion (error) non-apprehension and not misapprehension. The Naiyāyikas explain such an illusion as an extra ordinary perception of the objective entity-*jñāna lakṣaṇa pratyakṣa*. But this also does not escape the subjective

element in it. Kumārila, on the other hand openly admits the subjective element in illusion—a movement directed towards Advaita. In the purview of Advaita, Brahman is the ultimate cause of the manifestation of the universe as it is the possessor of māyā within it is an inevitable factor, Śāṅkara explains that it is because of the identification (tādātmya) of the unreal with the real that the world appears as real. However, the seeker's intuitive experience (aparokṣānubhūti) is the only proof of the demonstration of the fact that Brahman is the sole reality. In opposing the arguments of the critiques that if the world is unreal, unreal means like the Śruti texts cannot lead unreal ones to Brahman; if the world is real then it cannot be māyā; Śāṅkara argues that it is because of misunderstanding of the empirical with the transcendental as also the confusion of illusory with the empirical. Until Brahman is realised the world remains real. Now, to look into the fact of existence of matter it is required to analyse the upaniṣadic statements also. Why it creates is well explained in the Upaniṣadic statement 'Let me multiply and become many'.<sup>2</sup> It is due to the 'Creative impulse' in Brahman. This dual nature is explained in the scriptures like 'Tadejati tannaijati'<sup>3</sup>, 'pasyatyacakṣuḥ sa śṛṇotyakarnaḥ'<sup>4</sup>, 'adrṣṭo drṣṭa'<sup>5</sup> etc.

Science has put forward an ideal that embodies the rational phase of human evolution. It is also agreed upon by scientific investigations and experimentations that the matter and life are a result of the *creative impulse* that heralds the creation of the universe. Conditions in the universe develop in such a way that matter is created out of the initial condition. Life also is a product of this same creative impulse but in a different messy condition. Recent discoveries in science hold that cosmic strings are energy loops

that mark the initial condition. Life and matter are unified here. Life and energy are connectible to each other. (Einstein:  $E=MC^2$ ) The gradual increase in temperature to billions of degrees makes ready the primordial soup that gives rise to both matter and energy (life principle in the universe). Modern evolutionary theories proceed on to say that the *creative impulse* is for the preservation of life or physico-chemical causes. Whatever progress towards deeper understanding of the structure and content of the universe is brought out by scientific investigations, they fail to explain the reason behind the existence of matter and the occurrence of life here.

Śaṅkara has the real answer to this concern. He puts forth the ideal of oneness. Everything can be traced to this oneness referred to as 'Brahman'. It is the sole cause and the universe remains its effect. The creative impulse is the 'desire' (kāma or Īkṣa) in Brahman. It is not the commonsense desire but a desire that results in self-manifestation. Without any external agency it creates according to its own wishes. Life and matter are not simply preservation of energy but it is manifoldness brought about by the ego principle resulted out of Avidyā. With māyā as His ātmaśakti, He self manifests into the universe. If māyā is considered distinct it is only because of avidyākalpana. Śaṅkara calls māyā as anirvacanīya in the context of 'tatvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīya'. It is undifferentiated from Brahman. What brings in differentiation is nonetheless than the avidyākalpita rūpabheda. Brahman just manifests as Īśvara and the rest is the function of avidyā, not māyā.

iii) The third challenging task is to delve further into the domain of Māyā (māyā-illusion or the falling away from our authentic being) and understand its genuineness in terms of Śaṅkara. Generally the term 'Māyā' is used in the sense of illusion. Śaṅkara

accepts the view that māyā is the inscrutable power (Ātmaśakti) in Brahman that is inseparable from it and is also indefinable. As Brahman is nirvikāra, perfectly free from all attributes including change and motion, the whole function of the 'initial creation' is said to be pertaining to this Māyā. Because of this māyā, the real nature of Brahman remains far from being truly realised. Māyā is endowed with the three ingredients that become revealed in its manifestation alone-sattva, rajas and tamas. While in Brahman these three are in a harmonious state, in manifestation their imbalance starts to recapitulate resulting in the manifoldness of the universe. Māyā exhibits these in three forms of iccha, jñāna and kriyā. Jñāna marks the preponderance of satva over the others, iccha marks rajas and kriyā to tamas. This gives rise to immeasurable combinations of the ingredients and these constitute the jagat with the essential nature of Brahman inseparable from it. Because of this complexity of nature māyā is defined as anirvacanīya.

To understand the theory of avidyākalpita nature of the world it seems proper to know how the world can be successively negated to contemplate it as ultimately unreal. According to Prof. K.C.Bhaṭṭācārya, as an illusory object can be successively taken as real, then negated and finally contemplated as unreal, the illusory world can be taken at first as real and then negated and finally be contemplated as unreal. Similar is the case of 'rope-snake illusion'. Śāṅkara also uses the word Māyā to indicate avidya in the sense that it is the incapacity of man to understand the world in its true character. That is why it becomes negated finally when Brahman is realised.

Māyā can also be explained in a more realistic way. It is the falling away from our authentic being due to the longing for

empirical objects that makes us addicted to the earthy desires. Only when we turn back to the principle of Reality do we realise the fallacy in it. Again, māyā is not simply a principle that brings in this world. But it also remains responsible for beholding the world and therefore it is said as indefinable. How this maya that is the ātmaśakti of Brahman can be dislodged off by a common man if it belongs to the infinite Brahman?

Śaṅkara has the realistic answer-One does never bother about māyā. Since when the ego component is got rid of there is an experience of the knowledge of Brahman. When such knowledge prevails for a long time there is no thought about the world and such a person is fit for oneness with Brahman. But it is necessary that the whole life-matter integration has to occur for final integration whereby there is no return to this world again. Śaṅkara contends that such things happen due to the impressions of the ego.

Now to look from the ontological point of view, Māyā is the insentient principle that is the cause of the universe. But the problem here is: How can the sentient and insentient principles co-exist? According to Śaṅkara, the cause is 'ananya' to the effect. Meanwhile Śaṅkara calls Brahman 'anirvacanīya', for; the world-the effect-is different from the cause. It is a real problem that requires deeper understanding of the philosophy of Advaita. He views both Brahman and Māyā as indefinable since it is difficult to transcend the effect when one is in the realm of the effect. Māyā that covers Brahman does not permit accessibility to Brahman. But the function of Māyā to show the reality as an appearance is called self-manifestation, which is again indefinable. This self-manifest Brahman is the cause of the world and when it stops the manifestation it retrieves the whole world into Brahman.

This is possible only when there is harmony among the three ingredients of māyā. Life, matter and everything existent returns to the primordial state of Brahman waiting the next cycle of creation. All these functions of the projection of the world and re-absorption are carried on by māyā only which is indefinable. The point of concurrence in this context is that an in-between reality Īśvara (Pratyagātman) that exists because of dissonance can alone solve the crisis of sentient Brahman producing the insentient world and the objects within it. It can be said that the insentience factor is related to māyā which when associated with the self-manifest form creates the insentient prakṛti. This manifest entity is the real implication of the term 'Apara' and the Absolute 'Para'. But the later Advaitins had brought down this para aspect to an attributed, formful Brahman that has sentience as cetanāsvabhāva and insentience principle in it. This Brahman can be accounted as 'adhiṣṭhāna' and maya is the material cause of the universe. Śaṅkara uses the term 'ananya' in the sense that there is identity between cause and effect, but not complete identity. He also uses the term 'tādātmya' to explain this identity-some sort of indefinability in the identity statement. Māyā is not a different entity but 'something' indefinable and its knowledge is indeterminate as one transcends into 'Brahman' in the form of 'oneness'. When māyā which is a necessary condition, is transcended, one attains this oneness. So the problem of sentience/insentience and reality/unreality of the world can be solved by such a reasonably justified consideration.

Śrī Sarvajñātman clarifies that avidyā has its resting place in Īśvara (Pratyakcit) and not Brahman that supports the jīvas and the universe. In this sense māyā is different from avidyā. Citsukha and Ānandajñāna refute Udayana's criticism that indefinability re-



fers to the inability to define by explaining that indefinability indicates all possible ways of describing an object of thought as self-contradictory. And hence cannot be said as real or unreal. Dialectical specter thus does not end in fewer explications. These go on along with the development of newer concepts and deliberations.

### References

1. Taittiriyaopaniṣad, III.1.
  2. Chāndogyopaniṣad, VI.2.3.
  3. Īśāvāsyopaniṣad, 5.
  4. Śvetāśvataropaniṣad, III.19.
  5. Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad, III.7.23.
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