

## SANKARA : SOME LOGICAL REFLECTIONS

In this paper I have tried to point out certain inconsistencies in Śaṅkara's philosophy. As his philosophy is taken to be well known among scholars, I have not given the exposition of his views in details. I have explained his views within a few lines only and have, then, come to the inconsistencies concerned directly.

### I

In his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*, while criticising Yogācāra Buddhism, Śaṅkara quotes the line 'Yadantarjñeya rūpaṃ tad bahirvad avabhāsatē' from Diṅnaga's *Ālamāna Parikṣā* and says that the position of Yogācārin that the ideas appear like the external objects does not stand because it is impossible to feel and to say that ideas appear like the external objects unless and until the very existence of external objects is accepted. The criticism is a sound one. But what seems to me is that, while maintaining his own position on the problem of causation, he himself cannot escape from the clutches of this criticism.

After criticising the theory of *pariṇāma* he says that there is not real change, the so called changes are merely apparent. There is no *pariṇāma vikāra* (i.e., real change) in the cause when it takes the form of effect. The cause simply seems to be the effect. Thus he maintains the theory of apparent causation. Here Śaṅkara commits the same mistake for which he himself criticises Yogācārin because cause cannot appear to be the effect

unless the existence of the effect (i.e. real effect) is already accepted. That is to say, that the concept of apparent cause presupposes the concept of real cause. So the theory of apparent causation (*vivartavāda*) too presupposes the theory of real causation (*pariṇāmvāda*). The paradox of the situation precisely consists in the fact that Śaṅkara, after criticising *pariṇāmvāda*, gives the theory of *vivartavāda* by way of an improvement but this theory of *vivartavāda* is such that it cannot be accepted unless and until the theory of *pariṇāmvāda* is already accepted.

## II

Again in his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*, while criticising Yogācāra Buddhism, he, under the Sūtra '*Vaidharmyā dca na svapnādivat*' says that *jagat* or world is not like dreams and illusions because *jagat* and dreams etc. (i.e., illusions) are of different nature. But I think here again Śaṅkara is inconsistent because both authority and reasoning go to prove that in his philosophy *jagat* has been taken to be similar to dream and illusion.

Taking authority first, we see that the 56th sloka<sup>1</sup> of his *Aparokṣānubhūti* clearly shows that *jagat* is like a dream. The same conclusion is strengthened when we consider his explanation on the sūtra '*māyāmātram tu Kārtsnyenānabhivyakta svarūpatvāt*'<sup>2</sup> in his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*. The same is again established by the implications of his *adhyāsa bhāṣya* which has been inserted in his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* with the purpose of giving clues to explain the problem *jagat* or *vyavahāra* (i.e., empirical practice of the world) on the lines of illusion.<sup>3</sup> This is again confirmed when an advaitin Ānanda Bodha Bhaṭṭāraka in his *Nyūya Makaranda* says that the world is illusory because of inertness and objectness like the

objects perceived in dreams and nacre-silver.<sup>4</sup> The same (i. e., world is like dream and illusion) is accepted by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī also when he in his *Advaita Siddhi* says that *jagat* is *mihtyā* like nacre-silver.<sup>5</sup>

Now we come to show how reasoning goes to prove that in Śaṅkara's philosophy *jagat* or world is taken to be similar to dream and illusion. Śaṅkara's philosophy being non-dualism cannot accept both *Brahman* and *jagat* to be true. Keeping in view the practical considerations it cannot be said that *jagat* is utterly false. Now the only alternative to explain Śaṅkara's non-dualism and at the same time to account for the practical life is to accept the status of *jagat* at par with that of illusion. Though Śaṅkara has all these in mind yet while criticising Yogācārin's he quite cunningly says that *jagat* is not similar to dream and illusion.

One may point out here that Śaṅkar meets this situation by taking resort to his concept of empirical reality or *vyāvahārika sattā*. But to me it seems that this would not be a solution to the problem because the very classification of reality into *pāramārthika*, *vyāvahārika* and *prātibhāsika* is logically untenable. The term *prātibhāsika Sattā* is a contradiction in terms because a thing cannot be both a *pratibhāsa* and a *sattā*. And as belief in the *vyāvahārika sattā* is to be discarded on the dawn of higher knowledge, *vyāvahārika sattā* also is in a way *prātibhāasika sattā*. So *vyāvahārika sattā* also, like *prātibhāsika* one, happens to be something contradictory. Thus *vyāvahāra* or *jagat* is not better than *pratibhāsa* or illusion and therefore both are on the same level.

One may again say that though *jagat* is similar to illusion yet it is different from illusion because illusion is contradicted within very short time whereas *jagat* is not contradicted so shortly. To this my reply is that the length of the duration of illusion

makes no difference to its nature. An illusion lasting for ten minutes is not different in nature from the other one lasting for fifty years.

Another reasoning to show that *jagat-Brahma* illusion is not different in nature from snake-rope illusion can be given out of the very replies of advaitins. Advaitins, while facing the objection that *jagat* is real because it serves the practical purposes, say that simply on the ground of serving practical purposes *jagat* cannot be said to be real because unreal things, e.g. illusion and dream, also can serve the practical purposes. A dream can incapacitate the actual physical organs of a man and a snake in the rope can cause fear etc. Thus world-illusion is at par with the ordinary illusion.

Therefore according to the spirit of his philosophy Śaṅkara cannot say that *jagat* is not similar to illusion.

### III

In his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* Śaṅkara declares ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithya jīvo Brahmaiva nāparaḥ* '. In order to interpret this statement correctly one has to be quite sure about the exact meaning (as taken in Śaṅkara's philosophy) of the term ' *mithyā* '. Now my contention is that the interpretation of this statement leads to absurdity irrespective of meanings assigned to the term ' *mithyā* '. Here we would interpret the statement in the light of the meanings normally assigned to the term ' *mithyā* ' and then come to show that the statement goes against the fundamentals of Śaṅkara's philosophy.

In the Advaitavāda of Śaṅkara normally there seem to be three meanings of the term ' *mithyā* '. They are : 1. *Anṛtam rāma mithyā* 2. *Jñāna bādhyatvaṁ mithyātvam* 3. *Sadasadvilakṣaṇatvaṁ mithyātvam*. Here the second meaning happens to be a

form of the first one. So we will try to interpret the statement ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ', first in the light of the meaning of the term ' *mithyā* ' in the sense of *aṅṛta* or falsity and then in the light of the meaning of the term ' *mithyā* ' in the sense of *Sadasadvilakṣaṇa*. Now if the *jagat* is *mithyā* or *aṅṛta* or false then the statement ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ' is also false because this statement also is in the *jagat*. So its denial i. e., - ( *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ), or - (  $p \wedge q$  ) would be true. It means that either ' *Brahma satyaṁ* ' is false or ' *jaganmithyā* ' is false. That is to say that either *Brahma* is false or *jagat* is true. This is the very denial of Śaṅkara's theory.

Similarly taking the meaning of the term ' *mithyā* ' in the sense of *sadasadvilakṣaṇa* we see that the situation does not improve. If *jagat* is *sadasadvilakṣaṇa* then the proposition ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ' also happens to be *sadasadvilakṣaṇa* i. e., it is neither true nor false. But a proposition is either true or false. So ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ' is not a proposition or a meaningful statement but a mere ejaculation. And therefore it cannot be truly said that *Brahma* is *satya* and *jagat* is *mithyā*.

Even if we accept the statement ' *Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā* ' without going into its interpretation, the difficulties are not over. A non-Śaṅkarite or a man of ordinary tool of reasoning may question the very truth or falsity of this *jaganmithyā* *tva*. I will consider this problem in the light of both the meanings of the *mithyā* in the sense of *aṅṛta* or falsity and in the sense of *sadasadvilakṣaṇatva*. Now taking *mithyā* and so *mithyā* *tva* too in the sense of *aṅṛta* or falsity we see that if this *jaganmithyā* *tva* is true then the doctrine of non-dualism is gone because there would be two entities, the one *Brahman* and the other *jagat*

Now we will consider the issue by taking the terms '*mithyā*' and '*mithyātvā*' in the sense of *sadasadavilakṣaṇatva*. If *jaganmithyātvā* (i. e., *sadasadavilakṣaṇatva* of *jagat*) is true then the non-dualism falls down because there would be two realities, the one *Brahman* and the other *sadasadavilakṣaṇatva* of *jagat*. And if this *sadasadavilakṣaṇatva* of *jagat* is false then it is true that *jagat* is either true or false because the negation of 'neither true nor false' is 'either true or false' i.e.  $\neg(\neg p \wedge \neg q) = p \vee q$ . Again if *jagat* is true then the same difficulty will arise i.e., there would be two entities. And if *jagat* is false then the very falsity of *jagat* will also be false. So *jagat* will again happen to be true by the inference rule of double negation.

Thus there is no escape from the difficulties if we accept Śaṅkara's declaration that *Brahma* is *satya* and *jagat* is *mithyā*.

#### IV

In his Commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Upaniṣad*, while interpreting the *mahāvākya* '*Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi*', Śaṅkara maintains that there is unqualified identity between the individual soul and the Brahman. In fact what he really means here is that the soul viewed apart from the conditions which differentiate it from pure consciousness is identical with Brahman viewed apart from the attributes that differentiate it from pure consciousness. To me it seems that this identity cannot be reasonably held. Here I go not only against Śaṅkara but also against the upaniṣadic *mahāvākya* '*Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi*'. Now my contention is that at the very moment of feeling this unqualified identity between itself and the Brahman, the individual soul cannot attribute 'I' to itself because if it does so then it means that even at the very moment of feeling that identity it was under bondage in some or the other way. That is to say that if at the time of feeling identity the individual soul attributes 'I' to itself then it lands itself into contradiction

because if it feels identity then it cannot be under bondage at that time and if it is in bondage then it cannot feel identity.

This absurdity can be shown in another way also. Even if it is supposed that at the very time of feeling that identity the individual soul may attribute 'I' to itself, the so-called identity is not established. As the individual soul asserts that he is *Brahman* it means that at the time of feeling that identity he is conscious of himself and of *Brahman* also. That is to say that at the time of feeling that identity the duality of knower and known is there. So actually there is no identity between the individual soul and the *Brahman* and thus the very concept of liberation according to Śaṅkara falls down.

Thus it seems to me that Śaṅkara's views, as found in his own writings, have not been so consistent as they have been taken to be by the majority of the modern authors who have explained his views in English.

Department of Humanities  
and Social Sciences  
Indian Institute of Technology  
KANPUR 208 016 (India)

JAGAT NARAYAN MISRA

#### NOTES

1. *Anubhūtopi loko'yam vyavahārasamo'pi san āsadrūpo yathā svapna uttarakṣayābhādhataḥ.*
2. *Brahma-Sūtras*, 3. 2. 4.
3. *Tanmatamavidyākhyamātmānātmanoḥ itatetarādhyāsan puraskṛtya sarve pramāṇaprameyavyavahārāḥ.....*
4. *Svapna-bheda-avabhāsanavat.*
5. *Jagannīthya dṛśyatvāt, jaḍatvāt, paricchinnavāt, śuktirāpyavat.*
6. As in Sankara's philosophy ultimate reality is indescribable i.e., language fails to describe it, language is confined to empirical or worldly life alone according to him. In this connection it is also to be noted that according to him *pramāṇas* also are limited to worldly life only.

International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics, a biannual covering scholarly Articles on Dravidian and other languages of India and abroad.

Professionally rated as the best journal published from India and one of the best in the world.

Currently running its sixteenth volume, each number with 200 pages.

Single issue costs Rs.25/-

Annual subscription is Rs.50/-

Life Membership is Rs. 500/-

Chief Editor : V. I. Subramoniam.

Associate Chief Editor : A. P. Andrewskutty

An International Board of Editors suggests and comments on the articles, references, notes and communications.

Please Contact : The Associate Chief Editor,  
St. Xavier's College P. O.  
TRIVANDRUM.