

Book Reviews

2. Maitra, Tapti *A Constructive Study of Advaita Conception of Mind* (Datta Laxmi Trust, Pune, 1994).

The book under review is Maitra's important work on the Advaita conception of mind. It is an analytical work based on her study of the Advaita texts especially of Śaṅkarācharya. Her aim is to present a contemporary reading of the Advaita concepts of mind (antaḥkaraṇa), soul (ātman), perception (pratyakṣa) superimposition (adhyāsa), etc. The Advaita texts have much to say about the human mind and its functions. Here is an effort to bring out the contemporary relevance of the Advaita method of analysis.

Maitra has made a very important methodological claim on behalf of the Advaitins and it is that Advaita is a logical school rather than a metaphysical system. The claim is not only novel but also daring in view of the fact that Advaita has been traditionally recognized as a metaphysical school. Following in the footsteps of the late Professor Ganeswar Mishra who for the first time propounded the view that the Advaita method of philosophy is analytical rather than speculative, she has sought to prove that as far as the mental concepts in the Advaita system are concerned there is a definite logical way of understanding them. Besides, the so-called metaphysical concepts like Ātma, Brahman, Māyā, etc. are also logical concepts, according to her. It is no doubt true that the Advaitins as philosophers are more interested in the logic of the concepts rather than in speculative construction of a metaphysical system. Metaphysical system-building was relatively unknown in the Indian tradition unlike in the West. Indian metaphysicians relied more on experience to understand the meaning of the concepts even if they are overtly metaphysical. Advaita, especially of Śaṅkara's, is known for its logical acumen and its respect for logical analysis. It is not necessary that their concept of analysis should be exactly like that of the Western analytic thinkers, but it cannot be denied that they knew that conceptual analysis is the primary task of philosophy.

Maitra has noted with care that the Advaita conception of mind falls

easily into the world of the analytic understanding because of the fact that it is the one which could be freed from metaphysics. Just as in the West the Cartesian dualistic metaphysics of the mind has been rejected by the contemporary analytic thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Ryle, so also Śāṅkara and his fellow Advaitins have rejected the dualism of mind and body and have sought to underplay the metaphysical overtone of the concepts of mind and soul. Mind and soul have appeared not as deep metaphysical entities but as concepts through which human actions could be better understood.

Maitra has to say this on the Advaita notion of mind : “.... mind is not fundamental concept : mind cannot enjoy a privileged status” (p. 23) and further : “Mind is a predicate among all other predicates because of its predicatives use” (p. 23). Thus she has sought to show that the concept of mind according to the Advaitins is not a fundamental metaphysical category and that it can at best have a predicative status. It is predicative in nature for the fact that it can be attributed to the soul or ātman as a predicate like the body. Thus mind ceases to be a substance and has only a secondary status. This thesis presupposes that there is a category called Ātman which could be taken as the subject for such predicates as mind and body. Maitra further says : “As all predicates are fallible, they cannot be ascribed to the subject which is infallible in nature. The subject, devoid of all sorts of predicates and ascription, is pure consciousness (p. 26). That is, though the Ātman is the logical subject, it is as such devoid of predicates and it can take predicates only conditionally. Hence arises the Advaita theory of ignorance (Māyā) which explains how the contingency of predication arises.

Maitra handles the Advaita concept of Adhyāsa with sensitivity in order to show that there is a logical case of conditionality of predication. The subject-predicate distinction, that is, the distinction between Ātman and Anātman is a fundamental distinction in the Advaita system and any deviation from or displacement of it must be analysed logically rather than psychologically, Maitra succeeds in showing that the Ātman has no compulsion to have any predicates except under the compulsion of ordinary grammar. Mind and body are attributed to Ātman under the logical illusion that the Ātman is a thing or a substance, whereas Advaita takes it as the logical subject of all predications. It is the logical

subject in the limiting sense.

Maitra has devoted much attention to how the notion of mind (*antaḥkāraṇa*) arises and how it has been wrongly associated with psychological processes. She has also shown how the perceptions, desires, motives and intentions are to be seen logically rather than psychologically. This analysis has corroborated her main thesis already delineated. Thus a neat survey of the Advaita system of concepts is presented in the work with the aim to show that Advaita is not a metaphysical system and that it is logical analysis per excellence.

There is no doubt that the logical method of analysis in the Advaita system is very evident to be lost sight of by the critical thinkers. But it may be doubted if Advaita is nothing else but logical or conceptual analysis. It has been widely recognized that Advaita is a metaphysical system thought exactly in the Western sense. It is metaphysics because it explains the nature of world, self and the ultimate reality. As a metaphysics it has logic as its main instrument, though by logic we have to understand not in the formal, mathematical sense. Indian classical thinkers adopt the method of analysing language as a method of philosophical inquiry rather than construct a system of formal logic. In this sense Advaita is logical as well as metaphysical in its approach.

Besides, Advaita fulfils the spiritual need of people by virtue of the fact that it brings an end to spiritual suffering. It presents a model of the liberated man who not only has knowledge of reality but also follows the path of spiritual salvation. Maitra has not paid sufficient attention to these aspects because of her engagement with the analysis of the mental concepts. But some of her statements (cf. p. 116) do suggest that she has almost a dismissive view of the Advaita metaphysics. It may be because she has taken an exclusively logical view of Advaita. But why cannot logic and metaphysics go together? Why should being logical imply being anti-metaphysical? Sometimes it may so appear that conceptual analysis itself rules out metaphysics; but more often than not concepts themselves are embedded in a metaphysical system. Advaita of course as a metaphysics is not speculative because the ultimate reality for it is not matter of conceptual construction but a matter of illumination. It is through illumination that one knows the reality. Nonetheless, this is a kind of metaphysics.

Maitra's intention is very clear : she wants to see Advaita in new way. She has succeeded in this. The feeling still remains that she may not fully satisfy the classical scholars on Advaita on the need of having an Advaitic metaphysics notwithstanding her very cogent logical analysis of the mental concepts. However, her work deserves attention of even those who do not fully agree with her on her logical interpretation of the Advaita system.

-- R. C. Pradhan

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