

## DISCUSSION - I

### MAHĀVĀKYAS AGAIN

Skirting the issue of the similarity of the interpretations of the Fregean sentence, "The morning star is the evening star" and the Upanisadic sentence, "Tat tvam asi" known as Mahāvākya which was the bone of contention between me and Daya, Bokil has raised a quite different issue in his note on the Mahāvākya,<sup>1</sup> namely, whether there is identity at all between the empirical and transcendental selves. It is however a bit surprising that having stated very clearly at the beginning of his note that the said identity is "the cornerstone of Advaita Vedānta" Bokil should turn round later in the note to dub the identity as "Pseudoidentity". To question the identity of the empirical and the transcendental is to question the very fundamental basis of Advaita Vedānta. To answer the question we can do no better than to refer Bokil to wellknown, voluminous and highly polemical treatises like Advaitasiddhi, which discuss threadbare and with utmost subtlety the problem of the said identity in all its aspects. This does not mean that the problem has been tackled once for all and no further investigation about it can be made. Great Madhva logicians have argued vigorously against the Advaitic defense of the identity or nonduality. Bokil however has cavalierly dismissed the Advaitic doctrine of identity or nonduality with the facile remark that "the Advaita Vedāntins have not taken something more nearly their own size to strain at", without even remotely referring to any of the arguments marshalled in defense of identity by Madhusudana, Chitsukha or even a minor Advaitic author as Dharmraja. Moreover it is not quite clear from the remarks made by Bokil in the later portions of his note whether it is identity itself or the validity of the statement of the identity that he specifically objects to. On the second alternative, Bokil's argument amounts only to this that the demonstrative "Tat" can refer only to a material object and as such no empirical self can be sensibly asked to identify itself with a material object. This is a very flimsy

argument. Although the said demonstrative is a neuter-gender-word it can well refer to pure consciousness with which the empirical self, which is essentially sentient in nature, can well be asked to identify itself. There is nothing grammatically or epistemically incogruous in exhorting the empirical self to feel itself identical with the universal self when the underlying nature of the two is the same, that is pure sentience.

On the first alternative, Bokil's argument to deny identity is, as he says, based upon the wellknown principle of "the identity of the indiscernible". According to this principle distinguishables must be different from each other and so the empirical and universal selves being endowed with distinct incompatible properties must be different from each other. While arguing thus Bokil forgets that it is only by divesting the empirical and the universal selves of their respective distinctive properties that the identity of the underlying consciousness is asserted in the Māhāvākya. It may be also be stated here that not all schools of Indian Philosophy accept this principle. Only Nyaya Vaiśeṣika may be supposed to accept it, as according to it differences of things are determined by their distinctive and mutually - incompatible properties. But according to Buddhism things are distinct *sui generis*. This is why they are called "Svalaksana" or self defined. Advaita too does not subscribe to the principle, the reason for this being that if the difference of things is supposed to be determined by the difference of their properties then the difference of the properties would in its turn need the difference of the second level properties to determine it. This would lead to infinite regress. Besides, if things are different from their properties how can the difference of the latter be supposed to determine the difference of the former? Regarding the understanding of the meaning of the Māhāvākya, it needs to be pointed out that the verbal understanding of the meaning is quite different from the introspective understanding or spiritual realisation of the identity in one's own being. In the mind of a spiritually well groomed disciple the Māhāvākya as exhortatively pronounced by a competent preceptor would certainly produce the immediate realisation of the said identity. This is why this realisation is called verbally immediate by Advaitins.

Kanthamani's elaborate discussion<sup>2</sup> of mine and Daya's views has very

little relevance to the central point I was at pains to make in my rejoinder to Daya. I have argued that the Fregean sentence, "The morning star is the evening star" is intended to serve quite a different purpose than that of the Māhāvākya. Frege is concerned to show that if the sense and the reference of words are not distinguished from each other the above sentence would be reduced to the tautology, "The morning star is the morning star" or "The evening star is the evening star". But when the distinction is made the sentence yields the significant meaning that, "the entity that is the morning star is the same entity as the evening star". Thus both the senses are known as applicable to the same reference in the sentence. In the Mahāvākya on the other hand the situation is the diametrical opposite of this. Consciousness endowed with empiricallity is the referend of the demonstrative "Tvam and the same consciousness as endowed with univiersality is the referend of the demonstrative "Tat". The two cannot be identical. So by using the suggestive mode of meaning the two demonstratives are each made to shed a part of their meaning. What we are left with then is the common denominator of both the meanings, that is, the pure referend, which is pure consciousness, divested of both the distinctive properties. Thus while in the Fregean sentence the words retain both their sense and reference and the different senses apply to the referend; in the Mahāvākya the demonstratives shed their senses and retain only their identical reference divested of the different senses. We can even say that the demonstratives are used only as mere pointers to the reality, common to both the empirical and the transcendental.

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### NOTES

1. Note on Tattvamasi', *IPQ* July 99, pp 425-434.
2. Are Mahāvākyas Identity Vakyas, *IPO* July 99, pp 415-423.

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