

DISCUSSION - II

REFLECTIONS ON DRAVID'S "MAHAVAKYAS AGAIN"¹

Dravid's reaction to my "A Note On *Tattvamasī*"² begins with a bit of surprise he felt at my first stating clearly that the identity between the empirical and the transcendental selves is the cornerstone of Advaita Vedānta and then turning round later in the note to dub the identity as 'pseudo-identity'. Let me make it clear that there is no incongruity involved in this. In saying that the said identity is the cornerstone of Advaita Vedānta and further that "the system stands or falls with it (p.425), I was just drawing attention of the readers to the very high importance which the Advaita Vedantins attach to the sentence which expounds, according to them, the said identity. This does not mean that I had subscribed to that view initially and then in the end I had backed out from it. In fact, the whole and sole purpose of my note is to argue that the professed identity is highly improbable and well nigh untenable.

But before I substantiate this purpose in reacting to Dravid's reaction to my note, I should write a few lines about the context in which I have written my note. My note is to be read as a reaction to Dayakrishna's original paper.³ It was not intended to be a reaction to something that was being contended between Daya and Dravid regarding the issue of the similarity of the interpretations of the Fregean sentence: 'The morning star is the evening star' and the Upaniṣadic sentence " *Tat tvam asi*". Whatever may be the bone of their contention. I am interested only in fleshing out the meaningfulness of ' *Tat tvam asi*', if it has any. Since ' *Tat tvam asi*' is a sentence that belongs to a language, it is certainly legitimate to raise the question as to how that sentence becomes meaningful at all and further whether it can be said to have the meaning, which the Advaitins claim it to have. Sāṅskṛit is as natural and ordinary language as any other language. It is a human creation. The very

name given to it indicates this plainly. There is nothing sacrosanct about that language nor about any sentence that belongs to it. If, however, you look at 'Tat Tvam asi' right from the very start as a 'Mahāvākya' the die is cast and you beg the whole issue, which is normally regarded as a philosopher's sin. Dravid has missed the whole point as to why I state the essential difference between the Fregean sentence and the Upanisadic sentence as one between the scientific hypothesis and the metaphysical hypothesis. I think I have carefully stressed the major difference between the two in order to take the stand that 'Tat tvam asi' is a metaphysical hypothesis. (It may be noted that the Fregean sentence has now almost ceased to be of a hypothetical nature while 'Tat tvam asi' as stating identity between 'jeeva' and 'Brahman' continues and will continue to be hypothetical since there are no empirical as also conceptual means of knowing its truth. But then the difference becomes more accentuated.) To this distinction hardly can anyone object. My main question is: 'Whether any metaphysical hypothesis could be regarded as an identity statement in the sense of identity as referential identity?' (p.426) I do not know if anyone has raised the question in the form that I do. I have interpreted the title and the contents of Daya's paper referred to above from this angle. I know that philosophers with Advaitic leanings will be disturbed by my question because I do find that it is not at all an easy task which we philosophers can manage. It is not an easy task because philosophic inquiry, which involves '*nityānityavastuviveka*', is a never-ending job and it keeps on raising for ever new points and new queries owing to its unusually high criticalness as compared with other forms of inquiries. If Dravid thinks that my remark: "the Advaita Vedāntins have not taken something more nearly their own size to strain at" -cavalierly dismisses the Advaita doctrine of identity, he is free enough to hold his opinion to be sure, but he shouldn't think at least that it is a facile remark. I have made that remark with full awareness of what I have said and I have not just stopped at that. I have given my reasons to substantiate that remark. Instead of confining the discussion to those reasons, Dravid has referred me to the vast literature that either defends or rejects the Advaitin's view of identity or non-duality. I fail to see the relevance of this move of his. If he wants to suggest that I am ignorant of it, then he could be

sadly mistaken and if he wants to suggest that the literature contains a very solid conclusive defence of Advaitin's view of identity, he could be badly mistaken. Thinking of an argument being conclusive could be different from argument's being really conclusive. If *Advaitasiddhi* or for that matter any other philosophical work by Advaitin were to prove conclusively the said identity of empirical self with the universal self, the situation would have been very much different from what it is. Unfortunately for Advaitins, they find themselves in singular minority when all other schools of Indian thought have chosen to be unanimous in opposing Advaita Vedānta on this crucial issue despite their own intra-school and inter-school controversies about the metaphysical status of individual self and the world. The reason for my remark would become further more clear when one sees insurmountable difficulties in understanding and defending the Advaita view of mind and consciousness especially in the light of modern naturalistic developments in the area of philosophy of mind and cognitive science apart from the linguistic and logical difficulties one faces in comprehending the exact import of the Mahāvākya. Such abstract names as, consciousness, empirical consciousness, individual consciousness, pure consciousness, universal consciousness, transcendental consciousness, consciousness of consciousness and witness consciousness and so on and so forth, which philosophers glibly assume to be crystal clear and intelligible, have in recent times proven themselves to be hard nuts to crack. This has happened mainly because scientists until recently did not turn their attention to human consciousness. From physical world, the scientists have now turned to what we call 'the world of inner experience' and I shall not be surprised at all if the philosophic inquiry into that world takes on a radically new turn which may make us give up old views and replace them with new ones in conformity with the new scientific researches. We know how science has affected our old beliefs and practice in other walks of life. It's impossible that with modern ways of global communication, the old philosophies will remain in tact. To add to this, we should also take into account the onslaught of modern logic, philosophies of science and mathematics and recent linguistic studies. Philosophic inquiry has no longer remained a closed affair between master and disciple. When in my

note I made my skeptical minded disciple to ask his master as to how the master himself came to have the knowledge of Brahman and of jeeva's identity with Bhahman (p.430) it was rather a public request to make distinction between 'belief' and 'knowledge'. All those who are well aware of how this distinction which was supposed to be clear and distinct till recently has suffered at the hands of great thinkers in the West during the last few decades cannot be easily persuaded to accept the Advaitic position. Unless we clarify this distinction precisely and state what normative criteria would lead us from the state of mere belief to the state of knowledge, the skeptic cannot be silenced. Can we do this? All of us are indeed ridden with philosophical anxieties that center on the relation between mind and the world. I think that those anxieties cannot be shelved by creating metaphysical myths. They can be removed only by developing a logical space of reasons and not otherwise. It is quite possible that we may not be able forever to determine the boundaries of that logical space. It was indeed refreshing to read from Dravid's pen that "this does not mean that the problem has been tackled once for all and no further investigation about it can be made".⁴ But like many other traditionalists he is unable to get out of the shell of dogmatism.

In reacting to my reference to the principle of "the identity of the indiscernibles", Dravid has remarked that "it is by divesting the empirical and the universal selves of their respective distinctive properties that the identity of the underlying consciousness is asserted in the Mahāvākya."⁵ This remark, though profound, I must admit, beats me completely. While reacting to Daya's original paper, I had not denied that there are some problems with that principle since I was working within the sphere of philosophic inquiry where language and logic play prominent role. Dravid is asking me and others like me to mind very well that "regarding the understanding of the Mahāvākya, it needs to be pointed out that the verbal understanding of the meaning is quite different from the introspective understanding or spiritual realization of the identity in one's own being."⁶ I do not find all this of my own size to strain at. Dravid looks upon philosophy as a spiritual discipline, which I don't. For me philosophic inquiry is strictly argumentative and

therefore I prefer to stop.

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NOTES

1. Dravid N.S. : "Mahavakyas Again", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (July 2000) pp. 335-37.
2. Bokil S.V. : "A note on *Tattvamasi*" *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (July 1990), pp. 425-434. All page references in the brackets are to this article.
3. Dayakrishna: "Is '*Tattvam Asi*' the same type of Identity Statement as 'The Morning star is the Evening star?', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, no.1, pp. 1-13.
4. Dravid N.S. *Op. cit.* P. 335
5. *Ibid* p. 336
6. *Ibid* p. 336

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