

SEVEN PATHS TO WISDOM - LOGIC OF ADVAITA

The philosophy Advaita Vedanta has been expounded in many luminous ways by scholars, ancient and modern. It has been claimed to be the philosophy of Intuition or mystical oneness. Though it is primarily such, yet it has been shown that this is capable of being arrived at as the logical culmination of the method of 'negation' of all empirical categories of knowledge including subject and object though not its result which would have turned out to be without this intuitional realization of Absolute Reality just a grand negation (sunya). I have attempted elsewhere to show that Advaita is an intellectual philosophy though it takes umbrage under intuition ultimately.

In this paper it is my endeavour to show that method of negation (Upanisadically said to have been derived from the classic method of neti neti – not this, not this).

Taking the concept of pramanas, Advaita shows that there are degrees of truth though Reality is one only. The degrees are hierarchically arranged so that the higher pramana would sublimate or contradict and annul the lower. Thus perception is sublated by inference, and anumana will be sublated by s'abada. The ideal of

knowledge is abdahitajnan or uncontradicted knowledge. Even in respect of s'abada or scriptural testimony, the dualistic texts are said to be sublated by the non-dualistic or monistic texts. The monistic texts are said to be mahavakyas or great sentences which are not contradicted by any other superior texts. The knowledge arising from these texts is final and ultimate.

This leads us to consider the prameya or object of knowledge or Reality. Here consequent on the fixing up of the hierarchy of pramana there results the fixing up of the hierarchy of Reality or degrees of Reality. Here again the objects of dream are sublate by the objects of waking consciousness and these in turn will be sublated by the objects of the s'abada or Brahman. The world which is the object of sense perception is an illusion or becomes an illusion the moment the Supreme Brahman is realised by the sruti-jaya jnana. The Ultimate Reality is Brahman, the One Being.

The problem then is the reconciliation of the two basic experiences : one delivered by sense and reason and analogy and the other delivered by sruti. How Brahman who is described as One, Eternal, Infinite, Unchanging, Unqualified, Consciousness, Existence and Bliss in S'ruti appears as the Many, Changing, Finite, Divisible, Qualified, Unintelligent, non-existence and misery – in one word as the Contrary of Brahman (abhava of Brahman)? This is the primary problem. This

problem thus focuses the logical issue of Contradiction between Brahman and His opposite.

Advaita holds that the Brahman appears as its opposite due to maya, avidya, karma, all of which conceived as one or two or three. These three entities generally grouped under the one term avidya or ignorance make the Brahman's abhava so to speak appear in Brahman, veiling Brahman's nature (sat-chit, ananda and revealing asat, acit, and an-ananda, as if they belong to Brahman or are Brahman).

The analogy most helpful to understanding this is that of jabakusuma's red colour passing through a colourless crystal, and making the crystal appear red. Brahman is the crystal, jabakusum is equivalent to maya-vidya or the negation of Brahman – a polar opposite and the characteristics of this abhava appear as if in Brahman, shrouding the nature of Brahman – a shrouding or triodhana or adhyasa which is logical because the opposite or the abhava or bhava cannot but cancel each other.

It is also to be presumed that this is also a case of viparita or perversion in so far as the abhava of Brahman appears on bhava of Brahman, that is, the abhava has under certain circumstances (as in the case of the rope appearing as a snake or a non-existent image appearing as extent as in hallucination) the 'power' or in fact does appear as bhava. Thus the illusion is not due to seeing

something other than what it is but seeing the non-existent opposite as existent. Whilst in the first case it was just akhyati, the process had led to viparita-khyati, the perception of the non-existent opposite or contradictory as existent. It is also anirvacaniya khyati or expressible either as existent or non-existent, though it is not absolute sunya.

This concept is in one sense a little different from the identity – different view.

Let us examine the whole fabric of this logic in order to appreciate the technique of discovery or explanation.

The bhava (brahman) is described as follows: we shall enter in the corresponding opposite side the contradictory of it or its abhava.

i) Brahman is One opposite of it (abhava)	Many
ii) nirgunam	saguna
m	
iii)	
sat	asat
iv)	
cit	acit
v)	
ananda	dukha
vi) atindriya	indiryart

ha

vii)

nirakara

sakara

viii) nirmala

mala

ix)

atma

anatma

The abhava appears as bhava as the real bhava or Brahman because of the logical implication of all abhava in all bhava. Since every affirmative proposition can be expressed in a negative way and since this obversion conveys the same meaning, it gives rise to the other illusion or error of conceiving negation as implicated in and in a sense capable of being used as to define existence by its opposite. This is similar to the western Hegelian view that thought proceeds from affirmation to its opposite implicated logically or necessarily and then proceeds again to new affirmation and so on. This dialectical movement of opposites in discussion latter was converted into a process of evolutionary dialectic, Shankara utilized it in a more general way to include even perceptual as the opposite of the conceptual. Therefore it is called a peculiar power of making the opposite appear in the real, or maya which is logical actually and a matter of thought-construction in dialectical opposition, a vikalpa and a vivarata of Being and its nature.

Since it is thought that makes this negation to appear, thought itself is the falsifying factor. The transcendence of thought is what is called for for getting rid of this illusion.

But to proceed with the potentialities of negation of bhava or the logical contradictory to Being or Brahman, we can see that Advaita has been forced to create a realm of appearance (of Negation) of Brahman, so much so we found that in respect of God Brahman appears as if attributed by qualities which are opposed to its own Unqualified-nature, in respect of individual souls, it appears as if many and ignorant and limited, and in respect of Nature it appears as if it is inconsistent and infinitely divisible, and in respect of time, it is timeless, and so on. Later Advaitins have postulated that there are three types of veilings by these entities (abhava or Brahman or its contradictories so to speak) much so the pure or sattva, only creates the illusion of God, and can be known as Maya, that rajas again creates the illusion of souls, and it is known as avidya, and tamas creates the illusion of Nature and it is known as karma avidya the totality of these three is adhyasa of Brahman.

It is well known that the term avidya is within limits to be reckoned as vidyeta, other than vidya, and refers to karma. But when the negative begins to embrace a much wider area then we get into enlarging the area of negation and thus we arrive at the fecundity

principle of Negation of Being. Brahman is One only and indeed the Advaita thinkers refuse to accept that the terms applied to Brahman are qualities at all because they refer to the substance and qualities are other than substance and as such fall within the area of negation. Thus logical disjunction has been extended to involve illusion and thus intellect has been shown to be essentially Logic of the Negative.

Transcendence then of this intellect is the only method of arriving at Reality. All thought is riddled with the logic of the negative. It is only when the intellect is withdrawn that reality begins to lose its negative appearance or rather the appearance of the negative on it and we go beyond the illusion of the intellect.

In any case it is clear that the Mayavada Advaita makes a gallant attempt to reveal the limits of intellect, by defining the negative side of Brahman and deny it of Brahman, and affirm that the knowledge of the real nature of avidya is to get over the illusion that the negation of Brahman as appearance belongs to Brahman or is Brahma. The view sketched above is open to serious objections. Can the illusion of residence of Negation of Brahman which is pure Knowledge? (This criticism was raised by Sri Ramanuja in his famous Sri Bhasya). As an empirical fact it cannot but as a logical implication it can be assumed and subordinated to

Brahman under certain conditions. But why should this negative become so dominant as to veil altogether Brahman, and become dominant in Brahman which is ever dominant and changeless and the analogy of snake-ropes illusion cannot be applied at all. It is just possible that the negation (abhava) is perceptual and can appear more clear than the concept but this is impossible for we have seen that it is negation that is conceptual implication of being and it is not a perceptual experience. It is, however, likely that it may be argued that the Real is neither perceptual nor conceptual both of which belong to the abhava to Brahman but transcendent to both and sublimating them. That may likely be the meaning of inexpressibility but unfortunately this is not a position canvassed at all by the logicians of Advaita.

ii) The second criticism put in the form of a question is cause to establish it? This would fairly lead to infinite regress.

iii) Is the logical illusion capable of veiling the nature of Brahman in such a way as to create the illusion of divisibility, diversity, finitude and mortality?

iv) If the logical illusion is capable of doing it then the problem of release or freedom from it is impossible.

More than all these the question of questions is whether there is any pramana or method and means of

knowing this logical process of illusion or establishing the ideal-illusion of the logical-opposite of Brahman.

The concept of power of illusion for this logical-abhava or contradictory or polar-opposite cannot be certainly referred to the abhava or non-existence nor can the fecundity now referred to it be ever satisfactory. Whilst real existence alone can have power, it is seen that this power is transferred to non-existence – a position analogous to that of Buddhistic Nihilism. Further, if the Real is said to have Being and the unreal is to be equated with non-being, it is seen that the non-being develops a fecundity of appearances which are contradictory of all non-being itself. Thus the real logical alternatives are not Real and the negative but Being and its negative.

The approach to the definition of Brahman or its apprehension if definition is something that is said to limit the unconditioned, is only through a series of negations of known limitations, and thus it is Being that is being defined in terms of negation of non-being, it is seen that the non-being develops a fecundity of appearances which are contradictory of all non-being itself. Thus the real logical alternatives are not Real and the negative but Being and its negative.

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negations of known limitations, and thus it is Being that is being defined in terms of negation of non-being. This is certainly incapable of leading up to an apprehension of the Brahman in terms of the known. The Unknown is sought to be arrived at by denying the known. This is not a method that can fairly be said to be a process of jnana or knowing at all the arrival at the state of transcendence of knowing, known and knower is yet to be considered to be a process of knowledge.

The logic of the negative, which is used in a limited way in the Upanishad, proceeding a series or steps of the ladder of complete explanation or series of hypotheses about reality, cannot be so wholesalely applied as to make all the steps of the ladder utterly unreal. Indeed the total hypotheses must be capable of explaining the lower steps much better than what they could the higher steps.

The comparison of this logic of the Negative with the dialectical process of Hegel, is not possible for the non-being as the polar opposite of the being is a real moment in the dialectical triad of being-non-being and becoming. Though logically it is said to be an ideal passage of thought from being to non-being and becoming, in theory of evolutionary synthesis which is also Hegelian, the moments are real moments and not unreal at all. Thus the dialectic of Hegel appropriately posts the opposite of existence to elicit change or

becoming, and should we consider that it is but the appearance of non-being (abhava) of being on being. The Marxian dialectic rightly considered that the non-being is not barren non-being but a power of non-being that impels a change in being and makes it come to terms with it.

In Advaita logic of the negative this is not what is done. The logical opposite is barren however when it is the opposite of a Totality, but it can be fecund if it is in respect of particular objects. The particular objects, qualities, subjects etc., are all in Advaita of the non-being (of the Totality or the All), and therefore negation refuses to be really helpful except in reaching a grant Nihil or Nothing. Therefore it is that Mayavada basing itself on the abhava of Brahman (totality or transcendence) cannot but be unproved and is unintelligible.

The negation of Brahman, the Absolute can never be made to appear at all. Here also there is a way open to Hegelians who start not with the Ultimate Absolute as being but rather achieve it at the end as the grand Synthesis –the perfectly fulfilled and fulfilling Absolute or System or Reality. This however is not available to Mayavada Absolutism as Brahman being partless and changeless cannot produce its own opposite against which it is a constant rejection.

Thus it follows that the value of the approach

from the side of negation of the known towards the unknown is seductive or elusive. The exploitation of the 'neti neti' passages in the Upanishad does not lead to the positing or apprehension of an absolute that negatives all attributes but only those that are negated and has positive attributes affirmed of it. The logic of negation can lead to self-contradictions too.

Intellectual logic that works on the basis of dichotomy and negation can never lead to the concept of transcendence at all and does not even lead to positively real relativism.

Intuitional logic or necessity does not therefore conform to the pattern of the negational logic of dichotomy and illusion.

Shankara's logic is not intuitional; it is intellectual and commits suicide truly and cannot lead to intuition even. The Upanishadic Shruti has therefore to be approached in a different manner and by a different logic.