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ŚAMKARA'S APAROKṢĀNUBHŪTI – IS IT PRACTICAL?

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Abstract:

For Śamkara, non-duality or *advaita* is the only reality and duality is a matter of ignorance or *avidyā*. The individual self or *jīva* which is identical with Brahman, because of the superimposition of the limiting adjuncts of mind, body etc., appears to be different. So, as long as we are within *avidyā* such superimpositions will continue to exist and which creates hindrances in the non-dual perception of the reality. Now, question arises that being within the world of duality, how it is possible to go beyond *avidyā* and realise the reality of oneness or non-duality. Thus the paper will comprise first of all what Śamkara understands by the term *aparokṣānubhūti*. Moreover, the present study also will try to highlight Śamkara's view on the different antecedent conditions which Śamkara considers as pre-requisite for such perception. But the problem may arise in Śamkara's *aparokṣānubhūti* to show its practicality. Does the role of man is only to go beyond this world of multiplicity and to attain individual salvation? Does he has nothing to do as a man being in this world and help to attain universal salvation i.e., the salvation of others? In this present study, this problem may be tried to solve from the perspective of Vivekananda, who tries to see *aparokṣānubhūti* from the practical standpoint, as for him *aparokṣānubhūti* which he termed as 'transcendent perception' changes the way of looking at the world of duality without diminishing it and also gives way to universal salvation.

(Key Words: Self-realisation, Brahman, Knowledge, Action, Practical)

INTRODUCTION:

Aparokṣānubhūti, the term may be translated as immediate or direct realisation of the Self. According to Śamkara, it is the intuitive realisation or experience of the real nature of the Self which is identical with Brahman. Moreover, for Śamkara, this *aparokṣānubhūti* or Self-realisation is the only way to liberation, for, liberation for Śamkara, is not possible without the realisation of the Self.¹ According to Śamkara, in reality, both the supreme Self and the individual self are same, but due to the superimposition of the limiting adjuncts of the mind, body, sense organs, the real nature of the

individual soul i.e., pure consciousness cannot manifest itself. It is only due to ignorance or māyā which creates difference between the two. Thus the Self wrongly identifies itself with the limiting adjuncts and dwells in the realm of duality.

The discriminatory knowledge from the Upaniṣads, says Śaṅkara, enable the individual self to rise above the attachment from the adjuncts and realise its real nature. For, scriptures aim to remove the distinctions between the object and the subject created by māyā or nescience and also aim at establishing the identity between Brahman and the Self by removing all vestiges of transmigration as the opposite characteristics of the Self which are unreal.² Thus for Śaṅkara, the study of the scriptures is the pre-requisite for the realisation of the Self. However, it is to be mentioned that according to Śaṅkara, in order to get knowledge of the identity of Self and Brahman i.e., Self-realisation from the *śruti* three disciplines are needed i.e., *śravaṇa* or hearing, *manana* or reflecting, and *nididhyāsana* or meditating. Here, *śravaṇa* means the formal study of the Upaniṣads under the guidance of a Guru who himself has realised the truth of 'That thou art' or '*Tat tvam asi*'. The word 'That' refers to Brahman and the 'thou' refers to the Self and the meaning of the sentence implies the identity of Self and Brahman. In the second stage of *manana* the seeker must exercise his own reasoning in order to convince himself about the truth of the statement. The final stage or *nididhyāsana* means retaining the thought of 'Brahman-Self' identity in his intellect perpetually.³ It is the constant meditation of the truth in order to have the direct experience of the truth. Śaṅkara in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* holds that the instruction is repeated in *Upaniṣad* that the mental acts of hearing, reflecting, and meditating are to be repeated for the attainment of the intuitive realisation of the Self or Brahman which is the direct perceptible result of such mental acts.⁴ In this regard Govind Chandra Pande remarks "Thus, for Śaṅkara the knowledge of the Self arises from hearing the *mahāvākyas* and requires nothing more than their proper comprehension."⁵ This repetition comes to an end after the attainment of enlightenment, as he goes beyond the domain of scripture when he realizes the oneness of the Self with Brahman. But question may arise regarding how true knowledge of the identity of the Self with Brahman is possible from unreal Upaniṣadic text as it belongs to the empirical world. Śaṅkara tries to reconcile this by saying that when a man wakes up from a dream gets to know that dream experience was false but not the knowledge of the acts of those dreams. Before the realisation of the oneness of the Self and Brahman, the ideas of true and false involved in human and Vedic dealings remain intact. Thus after the realisation when all the multiplicities are destroyed by the ultimate means of valid knowledge there remains no scope for Brahman to be a composite thing.⁶

Furthermore, Śaṅkara following scriptures maintains that certain conditions are antecedents for the realisation of the Self or *aparokṣānubhūti* which are: discrimination of the eternal and non-eternal, renunciation of the

enjoyment of the fruits of action, acquirement of tranquility, self-restraint, *śama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titikṣā*, *samādhāna*, *śraddhā* and *mumuksutva* or the desire of final release.⁷These antecedent conditions are explained briefly here:

ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS:

The first antecedent condition is the discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal. Śaṅkara relied on the analysis of Self-awareness by the method of discrimination between the Self and the non-self. For Śaṅkara, the seeker must be able to distinguish between the eternal and the non-eternal. Here Śaṅkara considers the Self as eternal and everything else as non-eternal. Śaṅkara tries to explain this from two standpoints i.e., from empirical and absolute standpoint. From empirical standpoint though the world and all existing things have empirical reality but from absolute standpoint apart from Self or Brahman nothing is real and thus non-eternal. Thus Śaṅkara's method of *jñānamārga* for Self-realisation is discriminative disidentification, *ātmānatma-viveka*. In this process the Self is the only indubitable as the Self has to be there in doubting. But the empirical self is characterised by many identities which are to be rejected in order to get the true Self. This process of discrimination and negation is also called a process of spiritual dialectic.⁸ According to Śaṅkara, renunciation of the fruits of action is another condition required for the acquisition of the knowledge of the Self. The more the discriminative knowledge is cleared to the seeker the more detachment comes from the worldly enjoyments. This antecedent condition is required because the fruits of action belongs to the empirical world which is non-eternal. Actions bind man within the cycle of birth and death and as such detached actions are prescribed for the realisation of the Self. In this regard Ram Nath Sharma holds that "The seeker after truth must refuse to debase himself before things as they are and develop an austere detachment characteristic of the superior mind."⁹

Śaṅkara says the acquirement of tranquility and self-restraint are also needed for the realisation of the Self which depends upon the four fold means of *śama*, *dama*, *titikṣā*, *uparati* which is also called *sādhana-catustaya*.

As the mind is always attracted towards the empirical world thus for Śaṅkara it is to be controlled and fixed in the goal of achieving it which is called *śama*. *Dama* is controlling of senses and motor organs. The senses are naturally move towards the external world of objects and as such it is to be controlled which is possible through mental calmness. In order to realise the Self, Śaṅkara says, first, all the external activities of the organs should be given up, not only that, the mind is to be controlled because mind also thinks of objects, then the mind should hold steadfastly in the intellect which is the cognizing self and that intellect also should be withdrawn into the great Self through meditation. A man of enlightenment, should resort to tasteless or

unostentatious behaviour while following spiritual practices, i.e., he should not be attracted towards sense objects, without the sense of taste etc.¹⁰

The next condition, for Śaṁkara, required for the realisation of the Self is patience in suffering or *titikṣā*. For Śaṁkara, the forbearance of three kinds of suffering or *tapa* i.e., *ādhyātmika* or that stress within oneself, *ādhidāivika* or that due to nature like heat and cold, and *ādhibhoutika* or that caused by others like mosquitos, etc. is called *titikṣā*.¹¹

According to Śaṁkara, renunciation of the world or *uparati* is required for the realisation of the Self. Generally people are engaged in enjoying the material world but the seeker must refrain from such enjoyments which culminates in *sannyāsa*. Śaṁkara has talked about *sannyāsa* i.e., the fourth stage of life as helpful for the emergence of knowledge where continence is observed. Śaṁkara says that anyone belonging to the four stages of life can be steadfast in the real Self since all the stages are equally mentioned in Vedas. But the steadfastness in the Self is possible in the fourth stages of life as it is mentioned in Vedas that one incurs sin by giving up the duties of one's own stage of life. But the monk incurs no sin by the non-performance of duties as owing to his renunciation of duties. Ram Nath Sharma pointed out that for Śaṁkara, one may enter *sannyāsa* at any time of his life¹² though there are four stages of life among which the fourth stage is of *sannyāsa*. Moreover, the virtues like control of the senses and organs strengthen it. Monasticism for Śaṁkara, is subsidiary of the knowledge of Brahman for its full maturity in the fourth stage of life.¹³

The next condition is concentration of the mind or *samādhāna* which for Śaṁkara is one of the antecedent conditions. According to Śaṁkara keeping the mind in equilibrium is called *samādhāna* which is required for the knowledge of the Self and it comes automatically after the attainment of the previous conditions. *Śraddhā*, says Śaṁkara, is also required for the acquisition of the knowledge of the Self. For Śaṁkara, Self-realisation or the knowledge of the Self can only be obtained from the scriptures or *śruti* which is understood through the help of a Guru. Thus Śaṁkara says, the inquirer must have faith or *śraddha* in both *śruti* and Guru totally otherwise the truth or reality cannot be attained. In this regard Ram Nath Sharma holds that for Śaṁkara, the term faith mainly means faith in truth.¹⁴ After this comes the longing or desire for the release from bondage or *samsāra* which is called *mumukṣutva* and for Śaṁkara the inquirer must possess this desire for truth otherwise the realisation of reality is not possible. Govind Chandra Pande holds that for Śaṁkara the purity of the mind which follows from action without desire arises the desire to know the Self.¹⁵ Ram Nath Sharma observes that "For Śaṁkara, as for some greatest thinkers of the world, Plato and Plotinus, Spinoza and Hegel, philosophy is the austere vision of eternal truth, majestic in its freedom from the petty cares of man's paltry life. The seeker after self-realisation must have a burning desire for liberation which shall not be satisfied by anything short of complete freedom from the mire of

the world.”¹⁶ Thus, for Śāṁkara, these are the prerequisite conditions which are required before entering into the inquiry into the knowledge of Brahman. But as the objective of the paper is to find out its practicality so we need to look for its scope of application because if it cannot be applied then it may become impractical. The practicality of Śāṁkara's concept of *aparokṣānubhūti* may be tried to highlight by comparing it with Vivekananda.

COMPARISON:

The aim of *aparokṣānubhūti* in Śāṁkara may be to go beyond māyā and not to think about the world of multiplicity as there is nothing besides Brahman. It is observed that the realisation diminishes everything besides Brahman. There remains nothing only pure consciousness because the spell of māyā remains no more. As it is only because of māyā the multiplicity remains so the absence of māyā vanishes everything. It seems here that for Śāṁkara, the sole aim of man's life should be only self-realisation or realisation for himself. But is it sufficient to realise the reality for himself alone? Furthermore, does self-realisation end up all dealings in the world and with others? Is there no need of man being Brahman and help others also to be Brahman? Thus it may be said that in the concept of *aparokṣānubhūti* of Śāṁkara, the above mentioned problems may occur, as after self-realisation, Śāṁkara only gives stress on Brahman ignoring the multiplicity, the world.

Moreover, Śāṁkara's *aparokṣānubhūti* may seem to be narrower in its application in the sense that he is giving stress only to the path of knowledge. As for Śāṁkara, the soul's identity with Brahman is realized through knowledge otherwise liberation for soul, which is believed to be an agent and an experiencer by nature, is not possible as the *Upaniṣad* believes that except knowledge there is no other path for liberation.¹⁷ Thus, the problem will arise regarding its universal application because the path of knowledge which Śāṁkara prescribes as the only path for Self-realisation or *aparokṣānubhūti*, is purely intellectual and is fit for a selected few who are strong intellectually. As for Śāṁkara “*Not by yoga, not by Samkhya, not by Karma, nor by Upasana is liberation achieved. It is by understanding of the oneness of Brahman and the atman. Not otherwise. (V. C. no. 58)*”¹⁸ Moreover, Śāṁkara even made classification among man for the competency for the knowledge of Brahman. For him, the born śudras are not qualified because they are not competent to study Vedas and purificatory rites. Thus he makes distinction among the four classes of beings for the qualification of the knowledge of Brahman.¹⁹ Thus Śāṁkara's position may restricts its application worldwide i.e., universally by all.

But these problems may be tried to reconcile in the philosophy of Vivekananda, as he maintains that after realisation nothing destroys but it changes the way of looking at things. Vivekananda shows that after self-realisation the world of multiplicity itself becomes Brahman. He does not

show only what is to be negated but emphasises that after negating what appears in ignorance, a positive side will begin and that positive side is the deification of the world. As Vivekananda asserts, "...Maya, instead of being a horrible, hopeless dream, as it is now, will become beautiful, and this earth, instead of being a prison-house, will become our playground; and even dangers and difficulties, even all sufferings, will become deified and show us their real nature, will show us that behind everything, as the substance of everything, He is standing, and that He is the one real Self."²⁰ Vivekananda holds that, everything whatever is, is the manifestation of the Ultimate Reality, and the changes in the manifestations remain only in degree but not in kind.²¹ Vivekananda added, "We are, each one of us, that Brahman, that Reality, plus this Maya. If we can get rid of this Maya or ignorance, then we become what we really are."²² In this regard Tapash Sanker Dutta remarks that for Vivekananda, "The World is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not, as in Śaṅkara's Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is real and the World is illusory (*Brahman Satyam, Jaganmitha*) but that in a sense the world is also real."²³

However, Vivekananda tries to open the scope of *aparokṣānubhūti* for all by accepting the variety which exist in nature and keeps open not only the path of *Jñāna* but also the path of Karma, Bhakti, and Rāja Yoga to realise one's essence and as such he maintains that, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy – by one or more, or all of these – and be free."²⁴ Furthermore, in Vivekananda the aim of *aparokṣānubhūti* is not only to go beyond the world of multiplicity but to think for the human race with a new outlook of seeing Brahman in everything as Vivekananda affirms that if Brahman is the only reality, in this sense everything is Brahman. Vivekananda seems to be practical in compare to Śaṅkara as the later only satisfies the head, the intellect but Vivekananda tries to satisfy both head and heart.²⁵

CONCLUSION:

Thus, in compare to Vivekananda, Śaṅkara's philosophy may found to be narrow in its scope to be practiced as it gives stress only on *Jñāna mārga* and also gives stress more on the abstract idea of Brahman and less on the man being Brahman. Vivekananda, on the other hand, tries to show that any lay man can realise the essence of man and for realising it he is not needed to be in deserted place and away from *samsāra*. But a man even within *samsāra* can realise himself doing his duty as duty towards God. Moreover, Vivekananda's concept of *DaivdraNārāyanai*.e., to equate the status of man with God specially the poor and the downtrodden marks the practicality of Vivekananda's philosophy because if it is the self or Ātman which is identical with Brahman, in that sense every being is Brahman and serving them we can serve Brahman and which can also paves the way for Self-realisation. Moreover, Vivekananda stresses on not only being God

himself but make others also God, which means that instead of individual salvation he also emphasises universal salvation. Vivekananda declares that, “First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. “Be and make.” Let this be our motto.”²⁶ That is why may be Tapash Sanker Dutta holds that “The core of Vivekananda’s role lies his bold attempt of bringing down the sky-high elevated thoughts of Buddha and Śaṅkara down to the level of practical life and application.”²⁷ Vivekananda stresses on meditation with open eyes who works for the poor and the needy. Thus we can make out that practicality lies in its application and the practical application which we can find out in the philosophy of Vivekananda is missing in the philosophy of Śaṅkara. It seems to be one sided when only knowledge is given importance but action also is to be taken into account to apply the knowledge in the practical ground. That is why may be Tapash Sanker Dutta remarks that “In a general way, Swamiji laid down the Karma-Kanda of Buddha as a process of Nirvāṇa.”²⁸ Śaṅkara has given emphasis upon knowledge but Vivekananda, being a practical thinker has given importance to both knowledge and action. While giving emphasis upon knowledge he is similar to Śaṅkara but while giving importance to action he is found to be inspired by not only Buddha, but by his Guru Ramakrishna. Thus Tapash Sankar Dutta remarks, “The disciple got the sole inspiration of illumination from the Master and gave a practical shape to Vedanta.”^{29,30}

Reference:

¹Śrī Śaṅkarācārya’s *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Swami Madhavananda, (Trans.), 10th Edition, Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009, 6

²*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, Swami Gambhirananda, (Trans.), 13th Reprint Edition, Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016, 4.1.3

³*Védānta Prabódha*, Swāmi Paramānanda Bhāratī, Bangalore: Jnanasamvardhani Pratishtanam, 2014, p.281

⁴*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 4.1.1

⁵*Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, Govind Chandra Pande, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 2011, p.236

⁶*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 2.1.14

⁷*Ibid*, 1.1.1

⁸*Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, Govind Chandra Pande, *Op. Cit.*, p.178

⁹*Philosophy of Samkara*, Dr. Ram Nath Sharma, 1st Edition, Meerut: Kedar Nath Ram Nath and Co., 1981-82, p.57

¹⁰*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 3.4.50

¹¹*Védānta Prabódha*, Swāmi Paramānanda Bhāratī, *Op. Cit.*, p.10

¹²*Philosophy of Samkara*, Dr. Ram Nath Sharma, *Op. Cit.*, p.58

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- ¹³*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 3.4.20
- ¹⁴*Philosophy of Samkara*, Dr. Ram Nath Sharma, *Op. Cit.*, p.58
- ¹⁵*Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, Govind Chandra Pande, *Op. Cit.*, pp.229-230
- ¹⁶*Philosophy of Samkara*, Dr. Ram Nath Sharma, *Op. Cit.*, p.58
- ¹⁷*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 4.3.14
- ¹⁸*Introduction to Śaṅkara's Advaitism*. Dr. P. V. Joshi, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 2006, p.50
- ¹⁹*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Op. Cit.*, 1.3.34
- ²⁰*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Swami Vivekananda, 19th Impression Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999, vol.2, p.129
- ²¹*Ibid*, p.193-194
- ²²*Ibid*, p.254
- ²³*A Study of the Philosophy of Vivekananda (With reference to Advaita Vedānta and Great Universal Heart of Buddha)* Tapash Sanker Dutta, 1st Published Edition, Calcutta: Sribhumi Publishing Company, 1982, p.45
- ²⁴*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Swami Vivekananda, 23rd Impression Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000, vol.1, p.257
- ²⁵*A Study of the Philosophy of Vivekananda (With reference to Advaita Vedānta and Great Universal Heart of Buddha)* Tapash Sanker Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, p.45
- ²⁶*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Swami Vivekananda, 14th Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1998, vol.4, p.351
- ²⁷*A Study of the Philosophy of Vivekananda (With reference to Advaita Vedānta and Great Universal Heart of Buddha)* Tapash Sanker Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, p.32
- ²⁸*Ibid*, p.46
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p.35

Declaration

I, Dr. Parmita Chowdhury, Guest Lecturer of Pandu College, Guwahati, Assam, India, solemnly declare that the subject matter of the research paper entitled 'ŚAṂKARA'S APAROKṢĀNUBHŪTI – IS IT PRACTICAL?' is the outcome of my own research work. I further declare that this article has not been submitted to any university or any institution for publication wholly or partially to the best of my knowledge.
