

## SANKAR'S DOCTRINE OF ADHYASA : DIFFICULTIES OF PROPOSITIONAL SYMBOLISM

The doctrine of Adhyasa is a logical doctrine and not a psychological one. The error that is discussed here is logical and not psychological. In this logical doctrine, Sankara wishes to point out that the logical subject and the logical predicate belong to two different categories with distinct and opposite characteristics and their coupling in propositional symbolism is logically unsound. Ignorance of the category difference between the two leads to this kind of coupling in propositional form. In the propositional symbolism such as 'A is B', 'I am a Brahmin', 'This is a rope', the subject is a unique particular and the predicate is either a sortal universal (*viṣaya*) or a characterizing universal (*viṣayasya Dharmah*). In every proposition, a particular is collected under a universal either of the sortal type or of a characterising type as this is a rope or this is strong. But there is a type difference between the particular and the universal of either the sortal type or of the characterising type.

The particular (*viṣayee*) to which a *viṣaya* is attributed or predicated is self complete whereas the universal is dependent and incomplete to that extent. We are never mistaken about the particular but there is always a possibility of being mistaken in respect of the universal. Every judgment is corrigible in respect of the predicate that is asserted of the particular. In judging a thing as of this or that sort the possibility of misjudging can never be ruled out. But the particular which is being judged is never infected by this possibility at all. In this respect, the particular is real (*satya*) and for this very reason the universal is the opposite of it namely unreal (*Anṛta*). In the proposition 'this is a cow' or 'I am a Brahmin' the particular signified by the subject expression is firmly rooted in fact. If the speaker and the hearer do not know what is the point of reference there is no judgment at all. They are never mistaken as to what the thing is they are referring to. But in judging it to be a cow, the asserter might be making a mistake. 'Is a cow' or

'am a Brahmin' are not complete expressions. Further these expressions can appear only in assertive style in a propositional context, whereas expressions like 'this', 'that', 'I' can function independently outside the assertive context. Subject expressions in this sense introduce particulars which have a kind of independent existence which is absent in the case of universals introduced by the predicate expressions. Being a cow does not carry the existential import which always attaches to the particular introduced by the subject expression. For this reason Strawson following Frege calls the particular as saturated and universals as unsaturated. When something is judged as a cow it may not be a cow. In this respect, the universals are free floating. The introduction of the universal does not carry the supposition that it is instantiated. But the instance which we are trying to judge as of this or that sort is there identified both by the speaker and the hearer. Because of this type difference between the two, according to Sankara, this coupling in any judgmental or propositional form is a case of logical error. (Mithyeti Bhavitum Yuktam). The falsity or (Mithyatva) that is pointed out here is logical and not factual. The universal is not of the same sort as the particular and their coupling in the propositional context is non-relational. This is the reason why Sankara denies the reality of the relation of inherence (Samavāya).

Sankara's rejection of the notion of inherence is not pointless. If the universal were inseparably related with the particular there will be no occasion for our coupling them in an illogical way. Elements of thought which are distinct and different should not be coupled. If we do couple them we land ourselves in illogicality. *Vivarana Prameya Samgraha* points out that different things cannot be combined as a matter of fact without producing non-sense. Nobody would say that a cow is a horse. Similarly where there is no difference there is no point in identifying. It makes no sense to say that this is this, only elements of thought which are distinct may be combined in thought or in judgment which is called identity in difference (Tādātmya Adhyasa). So if the two elements of the judgements were already inseparable in judgement there is no point in coupling them in judgmental form and since we do couple them, we have to admit that there exists no inseparable relation between

the two. Nyāya admits the idea of inseparable relation in judgmental symbolism and Sankara rejects the idea of inseparable relation because he has reasons to find fault with judgemental symbolism. So what Nyāya is asserting and what the Vedānta is denying is logical entities and not factual entities. They do not assert that inseparable relation is or is not an article or furniture of the earth. Nyāya asserts that the category of inseparable relation has got to be admitted since the predicate rightly belongs to the subject. Similarly, Sankara asserts that the category of inseparable relation cannot be accepted as there is no necessity for it because what is signified by the predicate expression can in no circumstances belong to what is signified by the subject expression. Before leaving this point, I wish to draw the attention of the readers to a point which is worth noticing. Professor D. M. Datta, in his book '*The Six Ways of Knowing*' says that according to the Advaitins all propositions are relational (Samsargavagahi). He wishes to point out that Russell's claim that overlooking the distinctive character of relational propositions and accepting the universality of the subject predicate ones leads to absolutism is not correct. According to Prof. Datta even though the Vedantins accept that all propositions are relational yet it establishes an absolutism far more radical than that of the West. But it is evident that Prof. Datta has made a mistake. To characterise judgements as Samsargavagahi is not to characterise them as relational. Samsarga means, to be in contact to be brought to be existing together. It signifies the conjoining or coupling of elements of opposite character which is the same thing as non-relational tie. It signifies tying together what are not related. So according to Samkara and his followers all propositions are due to a coupling of a logical predicate to a logical subject. For the Vedantins, not all propositions are relational but none is. Every proposition is for the Vedantin of the subject predicate type.

The assertive tie is a non-relational tie. To say that it is a non-relational tie is to say that universals are not like caps or straight-jackets made to fit into one particular as opposed to another. Their very essence consists in their capacity to be applied to some rightly and to some wrongly. Their being applied in any instance does not carry the implication of being uniquely

fitting into the instance at hand and not being mistakenly or loosely being fitted in. Their open texture rules out the possibility of unique possession. For this reason, Wittgenstein so characteristically pointed out that language was never designed to reveal the form of reality. In this respect and for this matter every synthetic judgment is corrigible in character. This corrigibility is due to the open texture of the predicate expression and not due to unmistakable self complete and saturated particular introduced by the subject expression. Every judgment contains two elements of opposite character, an existent and a non-existent, a real and non-real coupled together. (Satyanrute Mithuhi Krutya ) in a non-relational manner.

All propositions including those which are counted as true and those which are counted as false at the factual level are based on a logical error which Sankara names as Adhyasa. Adhyasa in the context of Sankara Vedanta stands for the logical error of coupling two different elements of thought with categorial differences of fundamental type in case of all predication involving an ascription of either a sortal or a characterising universal to a particular which is its locus. The opponent points out that right judgments like "The animal before me is a cow", will be a case of logical error according to the definition given by Sankara. To this, Vachaspati replies that the Vedanta doctrine of logical error condemns equally these judgments which are correct judgments, those that are called incorrect ones. A logical distinction cuts across and goes deeper than the ordinary distinction of right and wrong judgments. A judgment which states a fact is called true and a judgment which does not state a fact is called false. But every judgment whether true or false in combining two elements which cannot and should not be combined becomes on that account logically erroneous. It does not mean superimposition of one object upon another like placing a piece of silver on a shell or a snake upon a rope. Tradition in rendering Adhyasa as superimposition is carried away by the example used in the Vedanta literature of shell silver or rope snake illusion. Since a man who mistakes a shell for a piece of silver is in actual case of illusion, traditional interpreters have understood the doctrine of Adhyasa as a doctrine of illusion. But Sankara and his contemporaries have used these examples

as illustrative of a logical point and nothing else. They are not discussing it at the factual level but by way of illustrating what they mean by logical error. They wish to point-out by the use of these examples how a predicate may be misapplied but never to assert that every body does misapply whenever he applies a predicate in actual case. That Sankara is only concerned with pointing out the logical relation among concepts or ideas and not with discussions of matters of fact is clear from the first part of the first sentence of his doctrine of Adhyasa which reads as follows. "The sphere of the application of ideas of subject and objects are mutually exclusive as those of light and darkness and any coupling of them is ruled out by the settled points of logic.." In this context one has simply to point out that to mistake a logical doctrine of a philosopher for a factual doctrine is to do maximum disservice to philosophy. A philosopher is concerned only with making logical points and he is not busy with detecting factual cases either of this world or of any other world. Metaphysics even in the days of Sankara was openly and avowedly concerned with linguistic and logical analysis—analysis of logical concepts or mapping out the entire conceptual frame work and with nothing else. Sankara's doctrine of Adhyasa preaches a philosophy of language and not an account of the illusory character of the world in which we live, move and have our being. This doctrine is a case of revisionary metaphysics and not a descriptive one, a distinction validly pointed out by Strawson in contemporary philosophy.

When pressed to state his new doctrine of predication involving the corrigibility of every judgment on account of the unstable character or the floating nature of universals Sankara states his position as thus; 'A judgment is like a memory but is not exactly a case of memory. In the case of a judgment we apply concepts to present case on the assumption of its similarity to other members of the class signified by the concept. Every judgment, therefore, while judging a thing to be of a sort carries the possibility of having misjudged it. This statement only signifies that universals are of a free floating character and that since they are capable of being applied to different instances on different occasions they are capable of being applied both rightly and wrongly. In other words, this statement signifies

that predicates in our language are not straight jacket. Because of their loose fitting character they may get attached to a body to which they do not fit. The statement by no stretch of imagination can be construed to assert that there is only one thing i.e., a Brahman whereas we the human mortals of the earth are in a perpetual state of illusion falsely believing that there are many things when actually there is only one thing on earth. Sankara's statement only asserts that merely apprehending a particular, i.e., the point of reference of the subject expression there is no possibility of error. But in judging this as of this or that sort of having this or that characteristics we land ourselves in the land of mistakability or falsifiability. It is so because there is a type difference, a category difference between the particular and the universal. The logical error to which he draws our attention and which is involved in every case of predication is due to our ignorance of fundamental difference between two logical categories of the logical subject and the logical predicate; the particular and the universal. The two categories are of opposite character and when we couple them in a judgmental form we apply the character of one to another to which it cannot belong. Here we agree with Sankara that there is a category difference between the particular and the universal; we also agree that the particular is saturated in the way the universal is not, that the one is complete and the other is incomplete and further that one carries existential implication while the other does not. We further agree that being a Brāhmin cannot significantly occur except in combination with particulars like Deva Datta in a propositional context. But the particular Deva Datta can occur in many other contexts in addition to judgmental or propositional context.

We agree with Sankara that the category difference between the particular and the universal is fundamental. The manner of the occurrence of the particular is different from the manner of the occurrence of the universal. Logicians have raised a doubt as to the validity of this distinction. In the proposition, 'Deva Datta is wise' these logicians point out that there is no reason to suppose that Deva Datta is the particular to which the universal wisdom is attributed. According to these logicians, this proposition is an assertion about Deva Datta as much as it is about

wisdom. The proposition may be validly taken to imply that wisdom is instantiated in Deva Datta. According to them, wisdom, therefore, is the subject of which it is said that it is instantiated in Deva Datta logically speaking. We do not have valid ground to hold that, Deva Datta is the particular and wisdom is the universal which is ascribed to it. In this rendering, there is no difference between wisdom and Deva Datta. Both the things are self-complete. No one can be said to be dependent upon the other. But as Strawson points out, this argument is invalid. If I say that wisdom is instantiated in Deva Datta, wisdom still occurs as the universal and Deva Datta as the particular. Wisdom still becomes the principle of collecting individuals of like nature as will be seen from the list of following propositions. Wisdom is instantiated in Deva Datta, wisdom is instantiated in Vishnu Datta. So when the question of occurrence is discussed, the reference is not to the grammatical occurrence of the expression but to the logical occurrence of it. Wisdom may appear to be the grammatical subject in these sentences but at the level of logic and meaning, it occurs as universal, the principle of collection of particulars, not as a particular. If the logician is concerned with grammar at all, he is concerned with depth grammar. In all these propositions, Deva Datta, Vishnu Datta etc. are the particulars to which the universal wisdom is attributed. So we have no option but to agree with Sankara that the distinction between the particular and the universal is a valid one and can never occur except as being dependent on or attributed to particular. The particular has a kind of independence which the universal does not possess and the universal has a kind of dependence which does not inhere in the particular. Strawson rightly points out that the distinction between the logical subject and the logical predicate is of a fundamental character and can on no account be blamed or overlooked. This point has been more clearly and forcefully elaborated by the author of the *Vivaraṇa Prameya Saṁgraha* in the following way. The universal either of the sortal or of the characterising type is a mere idea, a meaning cut loose from concrete fact where as the 'that' of which it is predicated is real and is rooted in fact. So even when you reformulate the judgment so as to mean that the particular is attributed to the universal by putting the universal in the subject place and the particular in the predicate place as in the

case, a goat is this; what is signified by a goat is a mere idea, a meaning a (Kalpanā). Your regarding the subject as the predicate does not make it so. (Yadyapyātmanānatman-oranyenya-sminnyonye Tādātmyādhyasaḥ Samansthapyatmanah samsru-starupenaibādhyase na svarupeneti satyatvam).<sup>1</sup>

In Vedantic language, the universal cannot exist except in the locus. In the two correcting and corrected judgments like 'this is silver' and 'this is shell' both the predicates depend upon and exist as being attached to the locus 'this'. The Vedānta Paribhāṣā, a later work in this field, rightly points out that the universals like being silver and being a shell are of the same type (Sama Sattāka) and both of them are different from the particular 'this' being of a different nature. (Viṣam Sattāka) The replacement of one universal by the other does signify a change (Parināma) but their change in no way affects the particular or is only apparent change (Vivarta). To a possible objection that if the correcting cognition namely being a shell is validly ascribed to a particular 'this' the corrected cognition of being a silver could not be ascribed to the same locus, the author replies by saying that he is not concerned with the question of which cognition is correct and which cognition is incorrect as a matter of fact. He is only interested in making the logical point that both the cognitions are of a dependent character and that they cannot occur except as being attributed to a particular and further that the substitutability of one predicate for another shows where corrigibility lies and where it does not lie. A change in the significance of a proposition is due to the dependent character of one part and not due to the other element which is self complete and remains unaffected and does not contribute to this change. This is colourfully expressed in the Vedānta literature that Brahman does not undergo any real modification.

That Sankara is interested in making a logical point and not a factual one becomes clear from another line of discussion which occurs in the same doctrine of Adhyasa. A conscientious objector points out that illusions occur only in the case of perceptible objects. One may mistakenly identify a rope which is present before him as a snake. But there can be no illusion in respect of imperceptible object like the self (Pratyagatman). To this, Sankara replies that there is no such scope



in my discussion that only a perceptible object may mistakenly be identified. My discussion does not relate to actual cases of illusion in which one object is mistaken for another. Mine is a logical distinction of a thing of one category being attributed to a thing of another category for do we not attribute the dimness of the earth to the ether which is imperceptible? I am only saying that whenever a predicate is attributed to a subject of whatever kind there is a logical error. Because subject and predicate are of different sorts. In saying that I am a Brāhmin, I am attributing the sortal universal of being a Brāhmin to a particular designated by the expression 'I' and this sort of ascription of a universal to a particular, a principle of collection to what is collected, an incomplete entity to a self-complete one is logically erroneous.

Of course; Sankara does not regard proper names like Deva Datta as suitable expressions for introducing a particular. For him unmistakability is the most essential criterion for regarding something as the particular and proper names like Deva Datta do not carry this mark. In the statement Deva Datta is a Brahmin there might arise a mistake both with regard to the thing identified and what is ascribed to it. The person before me may not be Deva Datta and he may not also be a Brahmin. So in such statement the distinction between the particular and the universal, the logical subject and the logical predicate is rather blurred. Sankara, therefore, chooses to classify ordinary proper names along with class names or common names. For him 'this', 'that' and 'I' are the only proper names in the logical sense. They alone can be regarded as logical proper names because there we can never be mistaken. In their case use and unmistakable use coincide. They can never be used except correctly or rightly used. Conditions of use and conditions of right use are identical. One cannot occur without the other occurring at the same time. One can doubt whether what one is identifying as Deva Datta is really Deva Datta. But one can never doubt whether the 'this' is the 'this' or anything else and whether the 'I' is the 'I'. Ganeswar Mishra is not alive makes sense but 'I am not alive' does not, except as a joke or as a self reproach.

So far Sankara is giving only a description of the manner of occurring and the functional difference between the two categories but immediately after this he enters upon the role of a revisionary metaphysician in declaring that the two can never be coupled without violation of the rules of logic. Particulars like 'Deva Datta' and 'this' or 'that' or 'I' may occur independently outside the judgmental context. But in the judgmental context they seek their fulfilment looking for a predicate. When I assert that Deva Datta is lame, the assertion is about Deva Datta and not about universal lameness. In this respect, Deva Datta is the subject, the locus, ( *Adhithāna* ) of being lame. What is signified by being lame has a dependent character. Particulars are granted a status in our conceptual system which is not granted to what is asserted of them. But from this it does not follow that they cannot be combined in propositional symbolism. Corrigibility of judgment is in the sphere of predicate expressions. Their misapplicability in particular instances does not involve a whole sale condemnation of them at all. The logical error which Sankara points out in the case of predication is itself, therefore, erroneous.

Having made the mistaken point that the particular that we introduce in our judgment are bare particulars with which no universal can be coupled Sankara now embarks upon a whole sale revision of our conceptual system. He recognises like Strawson that persons are basic particulars for explaining and making intelligible a large number of particulars of a secondary nature like knowledge, perception, inference, etc. but he immediately declares that this concept is a hybrid one and so all the secondary concepts which are to be made intelligible by the help of this concept are not intelligible at all. A person like myself and Deva Datta can know a thing by perception through the help of senses. He can make inferences about the existence of fire in the hill from the presence of the smoke in the hill provided he is a concrete person continuing in space and time and that the hill is a material body located at a particular point of space and continuing for a duration of time capable of being identified and reidentified. But since according to him the mountain is located in space, it is high, tall, smoky, are illegitimate judgments and since judgments like 'I have eyes', 'I see him' are born

out of a kind of ignorance of the nature of the logical subject and logical predicate, 'I know that the mountain is smoky' and 'I infer that the mountain is fiery' are illegitimate being vitiated by the logical error of predication, 'I see the mountain' is an illegitimate logical child and so also the cognition that the mountain is smoky and the mountain is fiery.

But since we agree with his distinction between subject and predicate but disagree with valid reasons with his conclusion that all judgments are logically erroneous we cannot accept his subsequent deduction that knower, knowledge, known, person, material bodies, inference, perception are logically untenable concepts. Sankara never asserts that our judgments are factually mistaken. He also never asserts that in fact I have no body or any one of us is in fact a Brāhmin, or lame or blind and here we cannot have any quarrel with him in this respect. He raises a logical point; part of what he asserts in the logical level is quite acceptable to us but another part which he asserts on this level is not acceptable to us. The logical subject and the logical predicate signify two moments of cognition. There is a category difference between the two in some sense. But we do not agree that they are so opposed, that they cannot be combined in any judgmental form or propositional symbolism and that every judgmental form involves a logical error.

Here Sankara appears in the role of a sceptic who is dissatisfied with combination of two cognitions of different sorts in the unity of a propositional form.

We have here only to point out that Sankara seeks to achieve what he wishes to achieve by quietly overlooking the principle which is the basis of his entire discussion. The saturated and the unsaturated character of the particular and the universal can be made clear only in the context of a propositional form. It is, therefore, illogical for Sankara to say that the two elements could not be combined in propositional symbolism. It is only their coupling in the propositional symbolism which helps us to distinguish the dependent and the independent character of the two elements. Outside this symbolism none of them are either dependent or independent. If their combination illustrates their difference, it is illogical to say that such different things cannot be

combined. We have only to conclude that the sceptic does not deny any obvious fact but he only covertly throws over board the principle upon which he has built his castle.

Further, even though we accept that the words like 'this', 'that' and 'I' can never be misidentifyingly used it does not give them a special status, a mystifying character. Sankara is making much of what may be regarded as a trivial point. They cannot be mistakenly used because they are no part of language, they are mere substitutes for the physical act of gesticulating. In merely pointing at I cannot mistakenly point at. True or false, mistaken, and nonmistaken occur at the level of language and not at the level of physical gesticulation. These purely referring expressions are mere pointers since they have no descriptive content at all. They can neither be mistakenly used nor correctly used for that matter. They are instruments of representation but do not represent anything at all. Sankara very nearly comes to realize this point when he says that how can that by which every thing is known be known at all. They are necessary in order that we may make significant statements by means of them. But they fall outside language. Therefore, Sankara's statement that Brahman is indescribable is a mere tautology. It only asserts that what does not belong to language cannot be described in language. In other words, it merely asserts that those words which do not have descriptive content have no descriptive content. It is logically illuminating to point out that referring expressions have no descriptive meaning and that only descriptive words can be misdescribingly used. But the statement that words with no descriptive content cannot be describingly or misdescribingly used in a trivial one.

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#### NOTES

1. *Vivaraṇa Prameya Saṁgraha*. Tr. Pramathanath Tarka Bhusana Vasumati Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta. P. 129.