

Objection and reply to a particular tenet of Advaita

In Advaita, the teachings of the scriptures, the teacher, the disciple, etc., are admitted to be only relatively real (and not absolutely real) since in fact the whole of the world is non-existent in all the three periods of time. The seventh verse in the Dashashloki, a decad of verses, of Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada says thus:

न शास्ता न शास्त्रं न शिष्यो न शिक्षा
न च त्वं न चाहं न चाऽयं प्रपञ्चः।
स्वरूपावबोधो विकल्पासहिष्णु-
स्तदेकोऽवशिष्टः शिवः केवलोऽहम् ॥ ७ ॥

There is neither teacher nor scriptures, neither student nor instruction, neither you nor I, nor this world. The knowledge of one's real nature does not admit of different perceptions. I remain as the one auspicious self, free from all attributes.

The direct realization of one's own true nature, caused by hearing, cogitating and meditating on the Vedantic teaching, accomplishes the negation/sublation of all duality, leaving only the Advaita Brahman as the residue.

The **objection** here would be that how in this philosophy this tenet is admitted: the false scripture, the false realization, false teaching to the false disciple and false liberation - contrary to all evidence?

The above objection is thus addressed -

The non-absolute nature of scriptures, etc. is taught by the Upanishad. Thus, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.3.21 and 4.3.22) says:

तद्वा अस्यैतदतिच्छन्दा अपहतपाप्माभयं रूपम् । तद्यथा प्रियया स्त्रिया सम्परिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरमेवमेवायं पुरुषः प्राज्ञेनात्मना सम्परिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरं तद्वा अस्यैतदाप्तकाममात्मकाममकामं रूपं शोकान्तरम् ॥ २१ ॥ 4.3.21

"That indeed is his true nature, free from desires, free from evils, free from fear. As a man fully embraced by his beloved wife knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within, so does this infinite being (the Atman), when fully embraced by the Supreme Self, know nothing that is without, nothing that is within. "That indeed is his nature, in which all his desires are fulfilled, in which all desires become the self and which is free from desires and devoid of grief."

Here, after stating the true nature of the Atman, as devoid of all worldly attributes, the next mantra elucidates it:

अत्र पितापिता भवति मातामाता लोका अलोका देवा अदेवा **वेदा अवेदा** । अत्र स्तेनोऽस्तेनो भवति भ्रूणहाभ्रूणहा चाण्डालोऽचाण्डालः पौल्कसोऽपौल्कसः श्रमणोऽश्रमणस्तापसोऽतापसोऽनन्वागतं पुण्येनानन्वागतं पापेन तीर्णो हि तदा सर्वाञ्छोकान्द्दयस्य भवति ॥ २२ ॥

"In this state a father is no more a father, a mother is no more a mother, the worlds are no more the worlds, the gods are no more the gods, **the Vedas are no more the Vedas**. In this state a thief is no more a thief, the killer of a noble brahmin is no more a killer, a chandala is no more a chandala, a paulkasa is no more a paulkasa, a monk is no more a monk, an ascetic is no more an ascetic. "This form of his is untouched by good deeds and untouched by evil deeds, for he is then beyond all the woes of his heart."

Here, the Upanishad, while saying that all the dharmas (attributes/properties) (in the waking state) which are perceived as belonging to the Atman in the state of bondage due to ignorance, do not exist in that individual (in the sleeping state) in the state of liberation, the mantra also says in the series that **the Vedas are no-Vedas**.

The commentary of Shankaracharya for this segment is:

The Vedas also, consisting of the *brahmanas*, which describe the means, the goal and their relation, as well as the *mantras*, and forming part of the rites, since they deal with them, whether already read or yet to be read, are connected with a man through those rites. Since he transcends those rites, the Vedas too then are no Vedas.

This is the meaning according to the commentary - Man, so far as he erroneously considers himself to be the doer and the enjoyer, approaches the Vedas to consummate his desires, thinking that 'the Veda accomplishes what I desire by instructing me the nature of action that I have to carry out.' Being devoid of such thinking in the state of sleep and liberation, the Veda serves no purpose towards it, and the Veda which exists in the state of waking and bondage (samsara) becomes non-Veda. Having given the highest purushartha, that is, liberation to the person, the Veda will not remain any longer in the state of liberation.

This also proves that even the teachings of the scriptures, the aspirant, etc. based on the Vedas are not transcendental but are related to the worldly state that is imagined by ignorance. This is clearly understood from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10 -

This self was indeed Brahman in the beginning. It knew verily itself as "I am Brahman." Therefore it became all.

This is meant by the above passage – the knowledge that 'I am Brahman' is attained by Brahman; Even before realizing so, Brahman was Brahman, only not aware of that fact. This shows that the pre-realization state of Brahman in its

state of samsara is not real, being caused by ignorance. And this is akin to something that is set aside by right knowledge, as in the case of the rope snake. The idea that 'this is a snake' is not real, so too the idea that 'I am a samsarin' is not real.

The description of the scripture, aspirant, teacher, etc. is given below in the context of the sixth chapter of the Chāndogya Upanishad –

Aruni-Uddalaka is the Preceptor. The disciple is Shvetaketu. The scriptures are the subject matter – 'By knowing one, everything is known' for the sake of liberation. And the teaching method is: by enumerating the three analogies of clay, gold and iron, the creation of elements from the Sat-Brahman, the cause of the universe, It being the cause of gross and subtle bodies, the non-difference of the effect from its cause, Sat Brahman being the essence of all the experienced world.

It can be seen that all this is part of the 'Vedas' as stated in the Shruti, **'Here the Vedas are the non-Vedas'**

In the Siddhantabindu of Sri Madhusudana Saraswati on the Dashashloki 7th verse, a Vedic passage is quoted:

The Absolute Truth does not tolerate dualities as It annihilates all duality. A fact that is obvious has to be admitted. And so the scripture says—

The shruti passage cited is:

'There is no destruction, no origination, none enlightened, no seeker.

This is the supreme truth. There is none desirous of liberation nor one that is liberated.'

(In the Atmopanishad, Brahmabindu Upanishad, Avadhutopanishad – this passage appears with a slight difference – 'bound' instead of 'enlightened')

Sri Madhusudana Saraswati cites the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10 -

This self was indeed Brahman in the beginning. It knew verily itself as "I am Brahman." Therefore it became all.

This passage teaches that for the one who, even before this realization, was the Absolute Truth (but ignorant of that fact), the direct Knowledge helps him realize that he is the Absolute Truth. It also dispels all idea of duality. 7 || (the citation from the Siddhantabindu ends here)

The commentary on the Arambhanadhikarana 2.1.14. (Brahmasutras) addresses the apparent contradiction that the *relatively real Veda is the source of knowledge that is not set aside subsequently.*

तदनन्यत्वमारम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः ॥ १४ ॥ 2.1.14 (excerpts from the Bhashya of Shankaracharya):

Opponent : But how can the true knowledge of the identity of the Self with Brahman arise from the unreal Upanidic texts? For a man does not die when bitten by a snake superimposed (by him) on a rope, nor are such needs as drinking and bathing fulfilled by the water in a mirage.

Vedantin : That creates no difficulty, for death etc. are seen to result from the suspicion of poison etc., and in the case of a man in a state of dream even such acts as being bitten by a snake and bathing in water do happen. Should one argue that such an act too is false, we would say that though the snakebite and bathing in water in the case of a dreamer be false, still the knowledge resulting from those acts is true, since that knowledge is not sublated even when he wakes up. For even when a man knows after waking that the acts of snake-bite and bathing in water etc., experienced by him in dream, were false, he does not surely consider the knowledge of those acts to be false as well. By this this non-sublation of the knowledge acquired by a

dreamer-it is to be understood that the doctrine of the identity of the Self with the mere body is also discarded.⁵ In support of this (true result arising from an unreal basis) is the Vedic text: "If in the course of performing some rite with a view to obtaining results, one sees a woman in a dream, one should conclude from that dream that the rite will be successful" (Ch. V. ii. 8), which shows the true fulfilment of a desire from the seeing of a false dream. So also, after declaring that when some evil omens come within the range of one's direct perception, one should conclude, "Methinks I shall not live long", it is said, "Then again, a black man with black teeth, if seen in a dream, causes the death of the dreamer", which text shows that true death is

indicated by that false dream itself. Moreover, it is a well-known fact in this world, that to people, well versed in the method of inferring from agreement and difference, a dream of a particular type prognosticates something, while a dream of another type foreshadows something else. Similarly from the false perception of the presence of letters in some lines (drawn on paper) the true letters like a etc. are grasped.⁶ Furthermore, the UpaniSads are the

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Self about which one may become curious. Besides, it cannot be said that such a knowledge does not arise, since there are the UpaniSadic texts like, "That reality of the Self he knew from him" (Ch. VI. xvi. 3). And this conclusion also follows from the enjoining of hearing etc., and study etc. of the Vedas as (direct and indirect) means to realization. It cannot be said that

the Vedas as (direct and indirect) means to realization. It cannot be said that this realization is useless or erroneous, since it is seen to lead to the eradication of ignorance, and since there is no other knowledge to override it. We said earlier that before the realization of the oneness of the Self, all ideas of true and false involved in human and Vedic dealings remain intact. Hence when all the old ideas of multiplicity become uprooted after the establishment of the oneness of the Self by the ultimate means of valid knowledge, there can be no fancying of Brahman as a composite thing.

That Shvetaketu attained this knowledge is stated by the Upanishad itself. And this is not contradicted by any subsequent perception.

The Bhagavatam 11.11.1,2 say:

The usage of words 'baddha (bound), mukta (liberated)' depend on the guna-s. Indeed the Atman does not have bondage and liberation. Because the guna-s are illusory, I am neither bound nor freed. **Just as a dream is a mental mode, not a reality, so too samsara is not a reality.**

NARAYANEYAM DSAKAM a-94. 5

O Lord! **In reality, for me, who is merged in You alone, there is no bondage or liberation.** Thy two aspects of Maayaa and knowledge manifest, indeed, like dreaming and awakening. The difference between the two, the bonded and the one who has achieved liberation while living, is that, the former, perched on the tree of the body has to eat the fruits of the sense experiences, while the latter does not have to do so and so is a non-suffering soul.

The Bhagavata also teaches the falsity of the universe by the analogy of the rope and the snake -

SB 10.14.25:

A person who mistakes a rope for a snake becomes fearful, but he then gives up his fear upon realizing that the so-called snake does not exist. Similarly, for those who fail to recognize You as the Supreme Soul of all souls, **the expansive illusory material existence arises, but knowledge of You at once causes it to subside.**

SB 4.22.38:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead manifests Himself as one with the cause and effect within this body, but one who has transcended the illusory energy by deliberate consideration, **which clears the misconception of a snake for a rope, can understand that the Paramātmā is eternally transcendental to the material creation** and situated in pure internal energy. Thus the Lord is transcendental to all material contamination. Unto Him only must one surrender.

The purpose of quoting the Bhagavata verse is to illustrate that the whole universe is false like a rope and a snake, and so is the Veda that is a part of the universe.

In another Brahmasutra आत्मेति तूपगच्छन्ति ग्राहयन्ति च ॥ ३ ॥ 4.1.3 Shankaracharya says:

The criticism is also unfounded that no one will be left over to practise the Vedantic path and that direct perception etc. will be outraged. For the transmigratory state is conceded before enlightenment, and the activities like perception are confined within that state only, because texts as this, "But when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one see and through what?" (Br. II. iv. 14), point out the absence of perception etc. in the state of enlightenment.

Opponent: In the absence of perception etc. the Vedas also will cease to exist.

Vedantin : That is no defect, since that position is admitted by us. For according to the texts starting with, "In this state the father is no father" and ending with "The Vedas are no Vedas" (Br. IV. iii. 22), we do admit the absence of the Vedas themselves in the state of enlightenment.

Thus, in the matter of the relative reality of the teaching, teacher, taught, etc. the Veda itself is authority and therefore the objection to this Vedantic premise is untenable.

Om Tat Sat