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## Refutation of *sattātraya* according to *Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī* of Prakāśānanda

**K Sripathy and Dr. V Nagarajan**

### Refutation of *Ajñātasattā*

Prakāśānanda starts refuting the three *sattās* advocated in advaita philosophy viz., *vyāvahārika*, *prātibhāsika* and *pāramārthika* by pointing out the defects in the theory of the *sattātraya*. “The person who propounds the three kinds of existence must be questioned whether considers duality as real or unreal. It cannot be real. If it is unreal, how it is three-fold.”<sup>[1]</sup> The visual perception is a process of knowing an object through mental modification or modification of mind (*vr̥tti*). The process regarding the visual perception is technically called as *pratīkarmavyavasthā* in advaita vedānta. For example, the water in a tank which enters in a small hole and also through a channel and finally reaches the fields. The water while entering into the channels assumes their respective shapes. Similarly, due to the consciousness, the luminous mind having acquiring the consciousness enters through the sense organs reaches the object and finally acquires the form of the object. This is called *antahkaraṇa vr̥tti*. The mental mode while reaching the objects unites the subject and object consciousness and removes the veil of ignorance on the object and illumines the object. Thus the perception takes place.

Here, the perceptual knowledge is due to the removal of veil of ignorance by amalgamation of subject and object consciousness through a particular kind of mental mode (*vr̥tti*). Thus, all the external objects in the world are covered by the veil of ignorance and for the knowledge of the objects the above process is required.

It is pertinent to note that all the objects of the world exist even though they are not known through a *vr̥tti*. That is, even before its perception the objects exist but not known, as the *vr̥tti* has not taken place. In other words, its existence is unapprehended and it is apprehended only when the *vr̥tti* takes place during perception. The objects in this type of existence before apprehension through *vr̥tti* is in the state of *ajñātasattā* or in the state of unapprehended existence. It is quite natural that even though the objects exist prior to the perception (i.e. when it is not apprehended), it is apprehended only during the perceptual process. These objects have *phalavyāptih* as they are perceived during perception and otherwise called as *phalavyāpya*. In the world which has an empirical existence (*vyāvahārika satta*), the said process is possible.

On contrary, even though the world is accepted as empirical (*vyāvahārika*) and is of the nature of *ajñātasattā* as stated above, it is also equated with the dream world in advaita. Also, in the shell-silver, the mental states as such as joy and sorrow are the *prātibhāsika* things and exist only when they are known. So, these things have no prior unapprehended existence and has an existence when they are known. So, the perceptual process in the way of contact between subject and object consciousness through *vr̥tti* does not take place. So, such *prātibhāsika* things have no *phalavyāptih* and have only *vr̥ttivyāptih* as it is known only through *vr̥tti*. In other words, the *prātibhāsika* things have no *ajñātasattā* or prior unapprehended existence. Therefore, the concept of *ajñātasattā* is not accepted in *dr̥ṣṭisr̥ṣṭivādah*.

Prakāśānanda quotes *Yogavāsishṭha* verse “all the things have avidyā as their source like the bubble, they come up for a moment and merges back in the great ocean of knowledge”<sup>[2]</sup> as *pramāṇa*. In *dr̥ṣṭisr̥ṣṭivādah*, Brahman is the only ultimate reality and the Brahman due to its association with *avidyā* imagine itself as *jīva* and in the capacity as *jīva* imagines the world of duality.

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Hence, *avidyā* is the root cause of the creation and the pure consciousness being reflected on the mode of *avidyā* projects the world. From this, it is also known that the consciousness is not tainted by *avidyā* and remains as *vijñānaghana*. If the Brahman is the only ultimate reality and everything is the projection of *avidyā*, then how the world can be said as empirical (*vyāvahārika*). Hence, it must be illusory or in other words it is just *prātibhāsika*. Therefore, when there is *dr̥ṣṭiḥ* (by *jīva* with *avidyā*) then the *sr̥ṣṭiḥ* (projection or imagination) happens. Also, it is not necessary to give the status of *ajñātasattā* (unapprehended existence) to the world and it is the *jīva* due to *avidyā* projects the world. Therefore, the objects of the world has no prior existence to *dr̥ṣṭiḥ* and it is a non-existence until its imagination (*dr̥ṣṭiḥ*) by *jīva*.

### Refutation of *Sattātraya*

The rejection of *ajñātasattā* of the world automatically leads to the non-acceptance of the *vyāvahārika sattā* (empirical existence) and results in the refutation of the conventional theory of the *sattātraya*. Prakāśānanda further questions that is it possible to perceive the objects though it has *ajñātasattā* (unapprehended existence) or empirical existence (*vyāvahārika*) by maintaining the dual order of reality. If so, is the dual order absolutely real or inexplicable (*anirvacanīya*)?

It cannot be the first (i.e. real). Because, the *pramāṇas* such as perception, etc., gain their validity only through some thing else and this leads to regress-ad-infinitum. When the *pramāṇas* are self-evident, then there must not be any defects due to the *pramāṇas*; but in real defects exist. The trustworthiness of the *pramāṇas* can be doubted. Considering it as a tool for objectifying the objects of the world for practical treatment does not contradicts with the vedanta position, as it can easily said that the objects of the world are falsely surmised unreal objects. But, considering the *pramāṇas* for objectifying the things that which can never be proved unreal cannot be correct. If so, then it leads to a situation that the *pramāṇas* cannot be negated in all the three periods of time. This is not tenable. Here a doubt can be raised that if the *pramāṇas* objectify the non-negated, is it self-evident or through some other *pramāṇas*. The *pramāṇas* cannot be self-evident as there are possibilities of defects in perception, etc., and we need to depend upon another proof which grasps the object without any defect. If the trustworthiness of a *pramāṇa* needs another support for its establishment, then the second one needs a third one and thus this results in regress-ad-infinitum. To avoid this defect of regress-ad-infinitum, sometimes the first cognition itself is considered as real and enough. At this juncture, it leads to the first defect of possibilities of defects in self-evident perception, etc., as stated supra. The *śruti* clearly states through passages such as “all this is not many”<sup>3</sup> and “know that the material cause of the world is *māyā*”<sup>4</sup> that as negation that takes place in the substratum of the *māyā* and the prakṛti, the whole creation is established to be illusory and therefore the untrustworthiness of perception, etc., which objectify the things is negated by the *śruti* itself.

Nor is the second alternative i.e. inexplicability (*anirvacanīya*) of unapprehended existence (*ajñātasattā*) as this leads to the doubt whether this inexplicability is established or not. If it is not established, then it means that there cannot be any example (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) to prove this. So, the inexplicability of ether, etc., cannot be proved due to lack of example (*dr̥ṣṭānta*). Moreover, consideration of rope-snake as an example for inexplicability does not hold good ; because it

is accepted as an illusory existence (*prātibhāsika*) and this can also be related to this world consisting of ether and others for terming them as *prātibhāsika*. Since *prātibhāsika* nature is proved in this manner, there is no need for the conception of *ajñātasattā* to establish the *vyāvahārika sattā*. On contrary, when the ether, etc., are accepted as *ajñātasattā* i.e. having an independent unapprehended existence even before perception, then how the example rope-snake can be related to ether which the exemplified as it is contradictory. Because, the example rope-snake being *prātibhāsika* order of existence in nature cannot be equated with the a different order of reality i.e. with the exemplified ether which has an unapprehended order of existence (*ajñātasattā*). Therefore *prātibhāsika sattā* must be attributed to the world and not the *vyāvahārika sattā*.

The opponent is not satisfactory and urges further that a person who left his house cannot be considered as no more and crying on the grounds of considering his absence at that particular place as a non-existence may happen if *vyāvahārika sattā* is rejected. The acceptance of *vyāvahārika sattā* does not leads to such situation as he may very well be considered as existing at the new place and therefore it is imperative to accept three *sattās*. From the view point of Prakāśānanda, the objection is not that much logical and this is not a defect itself. Every concept needs a *pramāṇa* as a support. Here, for the conclusion of non-existence, there is no *pramāṇa*. Since all the worldly transactions are nothing but dream, and in dream state it is not necessary to accept or negate anything. Because, in the state of erroneous knowledge, the negation is nowhere accepted. Therefore, the two order of existence viz., *prātibhāsika* and *pāramārthika* are more than enough and *vyāvahārika* is not necessary.

Again the opponent urges that in *dr̥ṣṭisr̥ṣṭivādah*, the creation has its existence when it is being perceived or the entire creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) is nothing but the *jīva*'s imagination (*dr̥ṣṭi*). So, the world has no unapprehended existence (*ajñātasattā*) and has no existence apart from its *dr̥ṣṭi*. If the creation has its existence when it is being perceived, then there will be a doubt about recollection (*pratyabijñā*) for which prior existence of a thing is mandatory. Absence of prior existence leads to the futility of the concept of recollection. One who has woken up from the sleep recognises the world as “this is the same world which I perceived already”. This type of recollection is possible only remembering a world which he knows previously. So, such recollection on the basis of remembering a previous thing is possible only when the *vyāvahārika sattā* / *ajñātasattā* is attributed to the world and such rejection of *ajñātasattā* leads such inconsistency with regard to recollection. Therefore, *vyāvahārika sattā* must be accepted.

Prakāśānanda rejects this idea and states that all the ten persons who have the same erroneous knowledge of snake simultaneously, run away by remembering that they all experienced the same snake. The experience of rope-snake due to the one's own erroneous knowledge cannot be known by another person since it is not possible to have the knowledge of others erroneous knowledge. Through their own erroneous perception, each one experience the object individually. Such erroneous knowledge is accepted in the case of ignorance or in the case of pot-experience. Because of ignorance, they remember, that they all perceived the same snake. Similarly, in the waking state, one who goes to sleep after experiencing the world, when wakes up from the sleep, perceives the world that is experienced as to be a different object or perceives afresh ; but there is no such remembrance at all and the remembrance is due to the

ignorance or due to error. Therefore, it is not necessary to accept *vyāvahārika sattā*.

The opponent further objects that when the world after waking is considered as different due to ignorance, then what happens to the world when a person enters into deep sleep. There is no proof for the world which gets dissolved in the deep-sleep. The objection of the opponent is set aside by the vedantin basing on a scriptural authority “The seer seeing is not lost, because the Self is eternal. There is nothing other than that Self, for perceiving something to be different from that”<sup>5</sup> which envisages the absence of duality in deep sleep and establishes the absence of the whole creation. Though there is an absence of sense organs in deep sleep state, since the seer Self is eternal, its perception too is eternal. Self is not seen there, because there is nothing other than the Self to perceive. Thus, as the body which is due to erroneous knowledge is negated with the negation of erroneous knowledge, there is no unapprehended existence (*ajñātasattā*). So the objection itself is not tenable.

The opponent further urges that the experience at the waking state is different from the experience of the erroneous knowledge i.e. the imaginary snake. To experience the objects of waking state, sense organs are necessary but on the other hand, *avidyā* is the cause for the knowledge of imaginary snake. The illusory things such as snake has no existence before their perception, whereas the phenomenal world exists even before its perception. Perception cannot take place without an object that has an existence before perception. Therefore, it is clear that when there are sense organs, knowledge takes place and these are not present there will be no knowledge. Hence, there is a compulsion for the object to exist before its perception. Thus, through the direct and indirect concomitance (*anvaya-vyatireka*), the sense organs are established as a cause of knowledge. Therefore, the world must exist even it is unapprehended (*ajñātasattā*). Thus, without accepting the *ajñātasattā* in respect of the phenomenal world, the difference between the true and false knowledge cannot be established.

Prakāśānanda answers that if the sense organs are accepted as the cause for the world, then the question is proper. But in real, the sense organs are not the cause for cognising the world. We say – whether the sense organs are the cause of (1) true knowledge only, or (2) for both true and false knowledge or (3) for false knowledge only.

It cannot be the first, because, the validity of true knowledge of a particular object happened through sense organs needs to be proved as different from the object of false knowledge. Similarly, the validity of false knowledge of a particular object happened through sense organs needs to be proved as different from the object of true knowledge. This leads to the defect of inter-dependence (*anyonyāśraya*) between the object of true and false knowledge. Moreover, an object, being an object of true knowledge cannot prove the real existence of that object. Because, the knowledge “This silver is unreal” happens only by true cognition but by having an unreal thing as its object. Also, it cannot be said that sense organs are the cause knowledge of the object or world which has unapprehended existence (*ajñātasattā*). If so, then Brahman can also be an object of sense organs. Since Brahman is devoid of attributes, it cannot be the object of sense organs. In general, the world is inert and nothing but a transformation of nescience. The Self is the substratum of the nescience. Therefore, the validity of the sense organs can be accepted when it takes the Self as its object and this is not possible since Self is devoid of attributes. Also, it cannot be considered

that since the Self is the substratum of the world, it automatically means that all the knowledge gained even of the world is of the Self and therefore the sense organs take the Self as its object or in other words the sense organs are the proof for the knowledge of the Self. This is not correct because the Self is devoid of attributes and cannot be the object of knowledge. Therefore, sense organs cannot be the cause of true knowledge.

It cannot be the second alternative i.e. sense organs as the cause of both true and false knowledge. Since, the sense organs as the cause of true knowledge is negated on the aforesaid grounds, automatically it cannot be the cause of both true and false knowledge. Nor the third alternative that the sense organs can be the cause of false knowledge only. Because, the opponent has already accepted the *avidyā* as the cause of false knowledge and such false notion happens only in a dream-like state. Also, it has already been established that through direct and indirect concomitance, the sense organs are the cause of erroneous cognition or erroneous creation of world. Therefore, it is clear that the Self is not an object of sense organ.

Hence, it is pertinent to note that everything apart from Brahman is in the form of *jñāna* and *jñeya* and these are nothing but the product of *avidyā*. The products of *avidyā* cannot have unapprehended existence (*ajñātasattā*) and exists in illusory manner (*prātibhāsika*) only at the time of perception. The verse from Yoga Vāsiṣṭha “All these existence is only a product of nescience; like the bubble they manifest for a moment and merge in the ocean of knowledge”<sup>[6]</sup> is taken as an authority.

## Reference

1. Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī - 11
2. अविद्यायोनयो भावाः सर्वस्य बुद्धदा इव ।  
क्षणमुद्भूय गच्छन्ति ज्ञानैकजलधौ लयम् ॥ (Yoga Vāsiṣṭhaḥ - Nirvāṇaprakaraṇa- 127.20)
3. नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन । (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad – 4.4.15)
4. मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यात् । (Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad - 4.10)
5. “नहि द्रष्टृष्टेर्विपरिलोपो विद्यते अविनाशित्वात् न तु तद्विद्वितीयमस्ति ततोऽन्यद्विभक्तं यत् पश्येत्” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad – 4.3.23)
6. See footnote 2