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Scientific pertinence of Advaita Vedānta: An expedition

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Abstract

Advaita Vedānta, the non-dualistic form of Vedanta philosophy expounded by Sri Śāṅkarācārya, stands as the soul of Indian orthodox philosophical Systems. It refers to its idea that the true self (Ātman) is the same as the ultimate metaphysical entity (Brahman). The unity of Jivātma and Paramātma is the main aim of Advaita philosophy. The basic concept of Advaita Vedānta can be understood from the following famous Advaitic expression; “ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या | जीवो ब्रह्मैव न अपरः ||”. Advaita considers ‘Brahman’ as the ultimate entity. It is accepted as the world’s most sumptuous, ancient, superannuated and pioneering testimony of the Science of mind. Even though Advaita expresses the spiritualistic side, materialistic side is also veiled in an embryo form. It is difficult to synthesise both science and spirituality as the former deals with materialistic theory while latter deals with spiritual science. Most of the scholars who were in an arduous search of knowledge focused only in the philosophical study of Advaita. Some of them never ever subjected its materialistic side especially the scientific aspect. Generally Spirituality is considered to be opposed to Science as it is closely associated with materialism. Some protagonists in the scientific field deliberately deny the concept of the Ātman and soul. Then how can we correlate both? What is the purpose of correlating both? Well it’s a relevant question. Being a part of philosophical inquisition, it is essential to focus on the contemporary pertinent thoughts of it, with special reference to modern world. We are living in a world, which is embellished with the impetus implementation of science and Technology.

Nowadays for everything we need scientific validity and it is very difficult to digest any idea which is scientifically irrelevant in nature. As Ādi Śāṅkaracharya says “प्रधानं मल्लेन निर्बहणं न्यायेन”, it is vital to defeat the most indispensable opponent i.e. modern scientific traits. But both spirituality and science are entirely different in nature. Because of that I don’t have any intention to make a differentiation or comparison between science and spirituality. But literally we can trace common traits in both. An Advaiti (one who is specialised in Advaita vedānta) can understand the specific unrealism only with the help of materialism.

Keyword: Synthesis of Science and Spirituality, seeking scientific validity of concepts mentioned in Upaniṣads. analysis of scientific traits mentioned in upaniṣads and śāṅkarabhāṣyagrathās etc.

Introduction

All of us know that Science is trying to see the Universe from the aspect of outer side while Advaita is trying to understand the universe inside you. While considering the above mentioned famous Advaitic expression “Brahma satyam jaganmidhya jīvo Brahmaiva na aparaha”, i.e. the Jagat (world) is unreal and the Brahman alone is the only reality. This is an antagonist interpretation of modern science. The unreality of the world is against the Newtonian theory of world, which states the reality of the world like, “The world is real and composed of atoms at its root which have their own firm reality, and it exists in absolute time and space. Such a view is purely contradictory to Advaita’s concept’. There may arise a lot of questions like ‘Is Advaita vedānta contradictory to science or scientific knowledge?’ Do Advaita have any pertinence with science or scientific knowledge? etc. Anyone who learn the in a particular dimension, will say yes to the second question. Advaita Vedānta have pertinence with science. one can find this through Advaitic scriptures such as Śāṅkarabhāṣyagrathās. No one can never neglect or refuse the scientific traits mentioned in these scriptures. This conceptual study is an attempt made to analyse the scientific pertinence of Advaita Vedānta in an abridged manner.

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Some instances

Consciousness in plants, Theory of relativity, Theory of Dissolution, Theory of reflection Diversity in creation, Physiological explanations, Anatomy, Concept of circulatory system, psychology, theory of origin of the universe etc are mentioned in various Advaitic scriptures, Especially the sixth chapter of chāndogyopaniṣad. For instance, we can see in the chāndogyopaniṣad śāṅkarabhāṣya, that even immovable things including plants are provided with consciousness (चेतन). That was mentioned like "चेतनावन्तः स्थावराः" In the sixth chapter of chāndogyopaniṣad Śāṅkarabhāṣya, while describing "जीवन्वृक्षदृष्टान्तः" the theory of consciousness in plants is well ascribed. It is stated as plants exists by absorbing large quantities of water and other substances from the earth, there one can find the germ form of osmosis process. It is mentioned as; "जीवेनात्मनानुप्रभूतोऽनुयासः पेपीयमानोऽत्यर्थं पिबन्नदकं भौमांश्च रसान्मूलेर्गृह्णन्मोदमानो हर्षं प्राप्नुवन्तिष्ठति". In muṇḍakopaniṣad Śāṅkarabhāṣya, Śrīśāṅkara says that human beings and all other beings which are living in nature depend on plants for breathing. 'जीवनं च प्राणादीनां प्राणापानौ, त्रीहियवौ हृदिरथौ ॥ The physiological and anatomical explanations are well explained in Advaita Vedānta and some of the examples can be quoted from Advaitic scriptures. For instance: All of us know that, about 80% of our body consists of water itself. This theory can be seen in the fifth chapter of chāndogyā, like बहुद्रवं च शरीरं पार्थिवं । Acārya says, in another context that it is through what is eaten and drunk, which the Jiva stays in the body and it reflects in every actions of Jiva. It is like 'अशितपीताभ्याम् देहे जिवस्तिष्ठति । ते च अशितपीते जीवकर्मानुसारिणी । In the first chapter of Śrīśāṅkarā's commentary of Taittiriya upaniṣad and fifth chapter of Bṛhadāranyaka upaniṣad śāṅkarabhāṣya, the nature of Human Heart and the nature of circulatory system are well defined. Śrī śāṅkara defines 'Hṛdayam' as 'त्र्यक्षरं हृदयम् ।' According to him, the Heart is made with a lump of flesh and it is in the form of a lotus, which is the custodian of vital air, circulate through various veins of which goes up and down. It can be clearly seen and is evident, when a dead animal is cut into pieces and examined.' अनेकनाटीसुषिर उध्वनाळो धोमुखो विशस्यमानो पशोः प्रसिद्ध उपलभ्यते । Heart or Hṛdayam is believed to be the prime and vital organ to become serviceable during the time of embryo formation. It is widely believed that the position of self (Ātma) is placed in the middle of the Heart. Heart is thus defined as 'त्र्यक्षरं हृदयम् ।' In Bṛhadāranyaka upaniṣad. Literally means it has three syllables. 'Hr' which means takes away, 'Da' which means providing and 'Yam' means controlling. The name (hṛdayam) defines the function of Heart which acts as a pump house which transports blood, continually propels oxygen, nutrients, wastes and many other substances into the interconnecting blood vessels. According to Praśnopaniṣad, there are seventy two crores seventy lakh ten thousand and twenty one nerves in the heart. Another aspect is psychological in nature. The skillfulness of the mind is mentioned so beautifully in chāndogyā upaniṣad, like 'सर्वस्य कार्यकारणस्य सामर्थ्यं मनकृतमेव । It is said that those who are provided with mental strength are more powerful than others. In other context, Mind is described as purely physiological and materialistic in nature. 'अन्नोपचितत्वान्मनसो भौतिकत्वमेव । Theory of relativity is well described in Brahmasūtra śāṅkarabhāṣya and it is mentioned as follows, 'नौस्थस्य नावि गच्छन्त्यां तदस्थेषु अगतिषु नगेषु प्रतिकूल गतिदर्शान् दुरेषु चक्षुषासन्निकृष्टेषु गच्छत्सु गत्यभावदर्शात् ।' For

instance a man in a moving boat, the stationary trees and other objects on the bank seem to move in the opposite direction and remote moving object is seem to be stationary. The above mentioned are only some examples of the scientific traits mentioned in the Advaita Vedānta.

Conclusion

The scientific traits and facts which have been revealed, point out the deep knowledge in the materialistic aspects of Advaita Vedānta, even though it is spiritualist in innate nature. But it is evident that no one can deny the scientific pertinence of Advaita Vedānta. It is most common trend with most spiritual cults. The antagonistic concept of modern science and Advaita Vedānta is derived on the basis of basic principles put forward by Advaita, such are world is unreal. Brahman is the base ultimate and it is the only reality. Science is only concerned with the superficial realities ie the level of world. It does not means neither science nor Advaita are irrelevant to each other. Many commenters declared modern science is contradictory to advaita vedānta. In fact the path of modern science and Advaita philosophy are the same. But the goals are different in nature. Both fields require accurate valid conceptual knowledge. The scientist is also guided by mind not by the heart. The science can teach Advaitin, how to use the knowledge and logical reasoning method to understand the nature of the world even for denial. And advaita can teach them about the further process after attaining the right conceptual knowledge. And it is to see the absolute within and became the one. It is evident that the spiritual knowledge is the highest goal in the case of an Advaitin. No one can deny the scientific pertinence of advaita with that of science.

End notes

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