CONTEXTUALIZING TRADITION AS PRIMORDIAL ONTOLOGICAL CONDITION IN CONTEMPORARY ADVAITIC DISCOURSE

S. Paneerselvam*

Abstract: Sankara's Advaita Vedanta is generally considered the crowning achievement of ancient Indian philosophical speculation. Many modern and contemporary scholars have applied various methods, such as analysis, Philosophy of language, phenomenology, the hermeneutic tradition, and logic, to re-read Sankara's contributions. Analysis groups heterogeneous philosophies that focus on analyzing linguistic or conceptual units. Modern scholars like Ganeswar Mishra, strongly influenced by Western philosophers such as A.J. Ayer, Russell, and Wittgenstein, applied the Western model to Indian philosophy, especially Advaita, and argued that linguistic analysis is Sankara's sole aim. B. K. Matilal is another important contemporary thinker who has attempted to understand the various systems of Indian philosophy, including Advaita, through analysis and the comparative method. Generally, scholars argue that Advaitins focused on individual liberation emphasize the intuitive experience of Brahman. This means that illumination is possible through Brahman nubhava. G.C. Nayak talks about illumination through analysis. This analysis rests on an understanding of Brahman's nature, not on inference or any other means. Ramakrishna Puligandla has also attempted to interpret Indian philosophy, especially Advaita Vedanta, using modern logic and analysis. For example, he examines Sankara's doctrine of adhyāsa analytically. Puligandla argues that the proposition that reality is formless, nameless, and non-dual is a necessary condition for the arising of the concept of adhyāsa; without this condition, the concept of adhyāsa cannot arise.

Tradition is the finite unfolding of an infinite content, a history of finite actualization of an essentially inexhaustible, or infinite, truth. In Gadamerian terms, it is an "inescapable facticity". Every retelling of it renews the tradition. Our belongingness to tradition is our primordial ontological condition. Tradition is the locus of understanding. Our past shapes us in various ways, and this has a tremendous influence on our understanding. The past and the present are related and become a continuous process through tradition. Traditionally, we think in our own terms. In contemporary Advaitic discourse, some of our thinkers explicitly discuss the synthesis of tradition and modernity.

What does the word "modernity" mean? Are tradition and modernity not irreconcilably opposed? "If modernity means outright rejection of tradition, then of course, there is no promise of fruitful dialogue and mediation." (Mohanty, 1992, p. 11) There are two ways of understanding modernity. First, modernity consists in addressing oneself to what is contemporaneous. It is a contemporary ongoing dialogue. A living

* Dr. S. PANEERSELVAM, Ret. Professor & Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Madras, presently a member of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, and General Secretary of the Indian Philosophical Congress, former National Fellow, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, former Chairperson, School of Philosophy &amp.

tradition, according to J.N. Mohanty, challenges the thinker. The second aspect concerns criticism. "Tradition demands respect and continuity." (Ibid., p. 13) Here, the traditionalist might say that in truth, any critical norm should be internal to the tradition. Many thinkers within the tradition have challenged the basic framework. Mohanty says, for example, that Buddha challenged the atman tradition, and Nagarjuna challenged the metaphysical-epistemological tradition. "A task which the Indian philosopher of today has to face, which our immediate predecessors either overlooked or took for granted, is to decide what is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy," says Mohanty. He examines the fundamental distinction between Indian and Western thought. He explains how his predecessors and contemporaries have used misleading clichés. He says distinctions like spiritual and non-spiritual, intellect and intuition, and logic and non-logical can no longer be maintained. These distinctions, he says, "cut across the Indian-Western dichotomy." (Ibid., p. 1)

One important theme on which Mohanty made a significant contribution is the role of tradition and modernity in Indian Philosophy. He says: "...unless one transcends the tradition, one cannot and need not ask such a question. (What is Indian philosophy?) Yet, unless one understands the tradition from within, one cannot answer it… We are thus confronted by a paradox, a paradox which we need not resolve it" (Ibid., p. 7). He is bold enough to ask why one should close the acceptable Vedic interpretation with Sayana, and why one should not admit Sri Aurobindo and Dayananda. (Ibid., p. 10) Mohanty's expertise in both Indian and Western philosophy is evident in his study of concepts such as truth, consciousness, meaning, and rationality. For him, both theoretical rationality and practical rationality co-exist in Indian thought. Professor Bina Gupta quotes him as follows: "There is a misleading inference made from the etymology of the word '*darsana*', that since *darsana* derives from the verbal root '*drs*' (to see), philosophy, on the Indian view, has something to do with 'seeing'. Does then each philosophical system represent, articulate, and conceptualize a way of seeing?... A person's being is not depressingly being in the world, but a being in the world that is grounded in the possibility of a transcendence into the beyond." (Mohanty, 2001, p. viii) Mohanty's training in analytic philosophy, modern logic, and phenomenology helped him reexamine Indian philosophy from a new perspective. Commenting on this, Bina Gupta very rightly says: "Educated Hindus, including Mohanty, studied, absorbed, and understood Western social and political concepts. This led to an examination of their own culture in the light of new experience. Western dynamism, realism, and secularism provided a much-needed corrective to Indian thought. They seized the opportunity to demonstrate that Indian philosophy is as great as any other without needing to reduce it to some amorphous spiritual claims." (Ibid., p. viii) Mohanty always believes that both the logical-analytical and the spiritual, the theoretical and the practical, exist side by side in Indian thinking. (Ibid., p. xiv)

One important theme in Mohanty's writings is the theoretical and practical aspects of Indian and Western philosophy. Some argue that Western philosophy is theoretical, whereas Indian philosophy is practical. This is wrong according to Mohanty. He shows that Indian philosophy combines both theory and practice. He says, "I think the time has come when we should completely revise the way we have been talking about Indian philosophy in the English language." He also questioned the unacceptable interpretations that have entered the Indian understanding. Westerners have interpreted or translated the Sanskrit writers. He analyses the notion of time and concludes that the Western reader, not knowing Sanskrit and having little knowledge of our philosophical literature, arrived at it and found it congenial because they immediately found an interesting contrast between Eastern and Western thinking. (Ibid., p. 5) He is bold

enough to argue that we have to be careful when translating Indian philosophical terms into English and to reject some of the ones we have been using.

We sometimes reduce the theoretical discourse to the practical, says Mohanty. He examines the relationship between theory and practice, an important theme in Indian philosophy. We shall very briefly examine them to see their relevance. He says that while the philosophies are theories, they are neither intuitive nor axiomatic nor empirical, but hermeneutic and critical in method. (Ibid., p. 28) A theory, according to him, proclaims and establishes its sovereignty, and accords to practice the dignity of realizing the theory. He rejects the view that Indian philosophy has only a practical aspect and lacks a theoretical aspect. He explains the theoretical base for Indian philosophy. His discussion of tradition and modernity gives philosophers a new direction. What does modernity mean? Are tradition and modernity not irreconcilably opposed? "If modernity means outright rejection of tradition, then of course, there is no promise of fruitful dialogue and mediation". (Mohanty, 1992, p. 11) According to him, there are two ways of understanding modernity. First, modernity consists in addressing oneself to what is contemporaneous. He says that it is a contemporary, ongoing dialogue. "Philosophical thinking is a dialogue," says Mohanty. A living tradition challenges the thinker. Further, he says that in the past, we, the philosophers in India, assumed a false and unphilosophical role in relation to our tradition, namely, interpreting it for the West. "This is unphilosophical, for it is not the task of philosophy to interpret something *to* some audience. The second aspect of modernity is the idea of criticism. "Tradition demands respect and continuity." (Ibid., 13) Here, the traditionalist might say that any critical norm should, in truth, be internal to the tradition. According to Mohanty, many thinkers within the tradition have challenged the basic framework. He quotes Buddha, who challenged the *atman* tradition, and Nagarjuna, who challenged the metaphysical-epistemological tradition. An interesting point is made by Mohanty in this context: "A task which the Indian philosopher of today has to face, which our immediate predecessors either overlooked or took for granted, is to decide what is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy." One should really appreciate him for giving space for openness to creative dialogue.

Against this backdrop of tradition and modernity, as J.N. Mohtany strongly supports, one can see how G.C. Nayak's interesting paper, "Illumination through Analysis: A study in Vedāntic conception vis-à-vis the Mādhyamika," addresses an important issue regarding the role of analysis in Advaita. Generally, scholars argue that Advaitins focused on individual liberation emphasize the intuitive experience of Brahman. This means that illumination is possible through *Brahmānubhāva*. But Nayak talks about illumination through analysis. This analysis is based on understanding the nature of Brahman, not on inference or any other means. (Śaṃkara's Commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, I.i.2) Different means of knowledge, though, are important; they cannot help us realize Brahman, and hence Śaṃkara shows the limitations of the *pramāṇas*. Perception and other means of knowledge cannot give us the immediate knowledge of the Self. This is because these means of knowledge are limited to empirical knowledge. The nature of the Self as identical with Brahman can be known only through the *śruti* texts and not through inference or any other *pramāṇas.* Knowledge of Brahman cannot be reduced to empirical knowledge. According to the Advaitins, the Vedānta-āgama-vākyas convey immediate knowledge. The Vedāntic texts, which are self-contained sentences, are valid in their own right. Nayak argues that the *vākyārthavicāraṇa,* or analysis of the meaning of statements, plays an important role in Śaṃkara's methodology. Thus, analysis of meaning is not something alien to Śaṃkara. But the analysis he speaks of differs from ordinary analysis because, for Śaṃkara, mere analysis of a statement is not important for realizing Brahman. It means that only the analysis of statements about the *mahāvākyas* will lead us to Brahman. This is the main reason that ordinary sentences are secular and cannot, in any way, help us attain liberation.

Ultimately, understanding the mahāvākyas gives us enlightenment. "… it is not merely the understanding of the explicit meaning of any sentence that gives enlightenment", says Nayak. (Nayak, p. 1) Without understanding the meaning of Vedāntic statements, one cannot realize the ultimate unity between the Ātman and Brahman; only through these statements can one gain access to Brahman. "The Knowledge of being eternally free comes from Vedāntic statements, not from anything else," says Śaṃkara. (*Upadeśasāhasri*, xviii, 188)

Vedāntic statements, which occupy a different realm and status, will lead to enlightenment. This means the texts, which deal solely with identity, help us realize it. Freedom or illumination here means freeing oneself from bondage; once attained, realization is possible. Freedom from bondage is possible through the knowledge of the *mahāvākyas*. Śaṃkara shows an analogy between the *mahāvākya*, *tattvamasi*, and statements like "The horse is dark," where there is a mutual restriction existing between each of the terms, "horse" excluding everything that is non-horse from the sense of the word "dark", and the word "dark" excluding everything that is non-black from the sense of the word "horse". (Ibid., xviii, 169) The word *tvam,* by being brought into conjunction with the word *tat*, which expresses the sense of being free from suffering (*nirduḥkha*), has the sense of being the sufferer (*duḥkhin*) excluded from it, and similarly the word *tat,* by coming into conjunction with the expressed sense of the word *tvam*, which is the inward self in its immediateness, has the sense of what is not the inward self or non-immediacy excluded from it. Śaṃkara does not consider the statements such as "*tat tvam asi* and "*neti neti*" as operating on different levels, because according to him, both are taken to explain the fact that for the understanding of Brahman, one has to negate what Brahman is not. (Ibid., xviii, 194-5)

The Vedāntic texts, *tat tvam asi*, convey the knowledge which is direct, immediate, and non-relational. In interpreting the *mahāvākya* like *tat tvam asi*, we must take into account the following: (1) the grammar of words, (2) the semantics of words, (3) the logic of the relation of the implication and the implied in construing the sentential import of the text, *tat tvam asi*. The grammatical coordination between the two words "*tat*" and "*tvam*" conveys meanings that are not synonymous. "Tat" means Brahman, which is infinite and non-dual. Similarly, the word "*tvam*" refers to the individual self. When we consider the mutual qualification of the two terms, *i.e.,* the qualification of the meaning of "*tat*" by "*tvam*" and the qualification of the meaning of "*tvam*" by "*tat,*" we find that a simple and direct identification of the same with the other outwardly conveyed by the sentence is not possible. (Balasubramanian, 1988, p. xxxviii). Since the two terms are mutually incompatible, it is incorrect to identify the terms "*tat*" and "*tvam*." To avoid this problem, we rely on the sentence's implied meaning, or lakṣyārtha. By removing the determinants of each term that are incompatible with the other term's determinants and retaining the common element, the text "tat tvam asi" conveys the sense of identity. This means that ultimately it is *śruti*, which conveys the direct and immediate knowledge of Brahman-Ātman, and the knowledge is non-sentential and non-relational.

Analyzing the meaning of the *mahāvākyas* removes ignorance. "When we get rid of the multiple forms created by *avidyā* or ignorance through an analysis of the meaning of the *mahāvākyas* like *tattvamasi,* we realize the Advaita or non-duality, the unity of all existence," says Nayak. (Nayak, 1978, p. 2) Here, Nayak analyses Ganeswar Misra's approach, which argues that, for Śaṃkara, everything is linguistic analysis. *For Misra, adyāsa, or avidyā, is nothing but linguistic confusion; consequently, Brahmajñāna is reduced to* linguistic illumination through linguistic analysis. For Misra, even *avidyā* is a linguistic error. This led Nayak to argue that Misra's position will lead

to the "fallacy of reductionism". I fully agree with Nayak. Nayak's arguments to substantiate the point, namely that Misra's position will lead to the fallacy of reductionism, are extremely good. I also have two points to add. Nayak examines the role of *śruti* to explain how the *mahāvākyas* help us realize Brahman. He says it cannot be understood as a logical analysis of meaning or as *śabda* as a linguistic category. For Nayak, some passages of ś*ruti* are not conducive to illumination. ś*ruti* cannot be a mere logical analysis of meaning. He says: "…some of the passages which are regarded as ś*abda* or ś*ruti* no less than others are regarded as either not being conducive to illumination or possessing only figurative or secondary significance." (Ibid., p. 3) Śaṃkara considers ś*ruti* or ś*abda* as a *pramāṇa*. But some scholars, like Ganeswar Misra, hold that āgama, śruti, śabda, and śāstra refer to the logical analysis of propositional symbolism. (Misra, 1976, p. 9) He further says that ś*abda* and ś*ruti* signify univocally language and linguistic forms, and nothing else. (Ibid.) But for Śaṃkara, ś*abda*, as a means of valid knowledge, has a two-fold capacity: it can communicate the facts of the sensible universe and also enlighten us on suprasensible truths because it is the only vehicle of suprasensuous knowledge.

In empirical usage, the testimony of a trustworthy person reveals the truth; in the suprasensuous sphere, scripture reveals what is true. This means verbal testimony can convey knowledge of both the sensible and the suprasensible. In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* (Śaṃkara's Commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, II, i, 27), Śaṃkara says that scripture is the only source of knowledge of suprasensible truths. In all empirical matters, the verbal testimony of a trustworthy person is valid, but Brahman cannot be known through a person's testimony because Brahman is trans-empirical; hence the Advaitins hold that Brahman can be known only through śruti, or verbal testimony. It is the only source of knowledge of the existent Brahman. Hence, Ganseswar Misra's contention that ś*abda* does not stand for authority but for critique of language cannot be acceptable.

Śaṃkara rejects the Mīmāṃsakas' position that ś*ruti* is a body of injunctions and prohibitions. But for Śaṃkara, by concentrating on the Vedāntic statements, Brahman can be realized. Nayak very well stresses this point. He probes what sort of analysis would lead to *mokṣa.* He says: "Certainly, one cannot say that illumination, according to Śaṃkara, would follow from an analysis by itself of the meaning of any referring expression of any identity statement *vis-à-vis* descriptive or prescriptive statements." (Nayak, 1978, p. 4) This means that, for Nayak, mere analysis will not lead to illumination. Illumination is possible only when statements are analyzed in the context of *mahāvākyas*. Nayak rightly says: "Even an analysis of secular statements like 'Thou art the tenth' or 'This is that Devadatta' can lead to illumination, provided they are considered alongside *tattvamasi*, etc. found in Vedāntic literature, which alone are regarded as *mahāvākyas*." (Ibid.) Thus, Nayak makes it clear that illumination is possible only when the secular sentences are discussed in relation to the *mahāvākyas*. Two things are emphasized by him. (1) When the Advaitins talk of analysis for illumination, it is not the ordinary analysis, and (2) the secular sentences are to be considered only in the context of the *mahāvākyas* because analysis of the *mahāvākyas* is essential for illumination.

An objection may be raised here. It may be argued that, when interpreting the mahāvākyas, we assign them additional value by constructing an ontology they do not possess. For example, one may argue that, in the case of the mahāvākyas, we take the meaning of these words further to show that they have transcendental value. In other words, the empirical meanings found in words like "tat", "tvam", and "asi" are replaced by another meaning that cannot fit within our language structure. One may argue that we are taking the language out of context and assigning it a meaning different from the ordinary one. We use language to refer to empirical things. A word denotes

an object or a thing that has some physical existence in the empirical reality. But how are we to understand the word "Brahman"? What meaning should we assign to this word? It is neither an object nor a thing that language can point out. How can ordinary sentences have Brahman as their object, when it is said to be eternal? Thus, one can question the meaning that is assigned to the word "Brahman". But Śaṃkara answers that the Upaniṣads do not present Brahman as "this" or "that"—an object for us to know. According to the *Upaniṣads*, Brahman is not an object (*aviṣaya*), because it is the inner self (*pratyagātmā*). noted by any word at all.

Nayak emphasizes the importance of *śruti* or verbal testimony. He explains how *śruti* is not a mere logical analysis of meaning. Advaita holds that Brahman can be known only through śruti, or Vedic testimony. Verbal testimony is of two kinds, namely that which is personal (*pauruṣeya*) and that which is impersonal (*pauruṣeya*). Brahman or Ātman, the absolute reality, is trans-empirical and can be known through śruti, or Vedic testimony. The Mīmāṃsakas questioned this. For them, action is the import of all sentences, including the scriptural sentences. The meaning of words is known only when they occur in injunctive sentences, whose import is action. Vedic sentences are no exception. The Mīmāṃsakas regard the Veda as a book of commandments. It consists of injunctions and prohibitions (*vidhi-niṣeda*). They say that the assertive sentences in the Veda are significant only when they are construed in accordance with the injunctive texts. Hence, the entire Veda has its purport only in action.

The Absolute or Brahman is ever existent. It is not something that is to be accomplished by action. Since Vedic sentences have no significance with respect to the existent Brahman, which is not related to action, the Mīmāṃsakas hold that Vedic sentences cannot give us knowledge of Brahman. The Mīmāṃsakas' contention cannot be accepted, because it is incorrect to say that the purport of entire Vedic sentences is action. For example, a text like "Brahman is real, knowledge, and bliss" only explains the nature of the existent Brahman. Sentences of this kind are significant in and of themselves. Moreover, action cannot be the import of all secular sentences. Some sentences give only information about something. For example, a person mistakes a rope for a snake and is frightened. To remove his fear, we do not subject him to an injunction, "Don't be afraid," but we give him the information that the object in front is only a rope, not a snake. The import of the assertive sentence "This is a rope" is not in any action to be done. But the sentence is not without significance." (Balasubramanian, 1976, p. 10)

The Mīmāṃsakas put forth another argument, claiming that śruti, or Vedic testimony, cannot explain the nature of Brahman. According to them, if Brahman is already known through any valid means of knowledge other than śruti, then śruti is merely a restatement of it and hence has no validity. On the other hand, if Brahman is not known through any means other than ś*ruti*, then ś*ruti* cannot explain the nature of Brahman for the main reason that words are significant and denote objects only when they occur in injunctive sentences that lead to action. Brahman is ever-existent and cannot be accomplished by action; it cannot fall within the scope of ś*ruti*. (Ibid., p.12) The argument is also unacceptable to the Advaitins because, for them, Brahman is trans-empirical, and the various means of valid knowledge other than śruti cannot explain it. Only through the Vedic sentences can one know the nature of Brahman. "A sentence must be admitted to be a source of knowledge if it conveys a sense not already known, through words whose meanings are already known. The validity of the Upaniṣads can be justified in the same way, because they intimate Brahman, which is otherwise not known, through words whose meanings are already known to us in empirical discourse." (Ibid., p.14)

Here, one must examine the ontological status of ś*ruti.* According to Advaita,

Brahman alone is real, and everything other than Brahman is illusory or *mithyā*. This means that śruti, which is different from Brahman, is also illusory. Moreover, all the means of knowledge, including ś*ruti,* are valid only within the empirical framework. Śruti, which functions only at the empirical level, is valid for one ignorant of Brahman. For one who has realized the Self, śruti is no longer a pramāṇa. Since sruti, along with the entire empirical realm, undergoes sublation at the dawn of knowledge, it is said to be mithyā in terms of its ontological status. The ontological status of *śruti* does not jeopardize its functioning as a *pramāṇa*. (Balasubramanian, 1988, p. 212)

Ramakrishna Puligandla is another important scholar who works on this "comparative-analytical" methodology to interpret Śaṃkara. His scholarship reflects a Western-perspective approach to Indian philosophy. As a philosopher of independent thinking, he applies an interesting and novel method of understanding Advaita. His method of analysis can also be considered comparative-analytic, as he uses Western methods to approach Indian philosophy, especially Advaita Vedānta. For example, he applies the Big Bang theory, Derrida's Deconstruction, and the Western Philosophy of language to understand Advaita. He examines the doctrine of adhyāsa from an analytical standpoint in his paper, "An Analytical Interpretation of Śaṃkara's philosophy" (Puligandla, 1992, pp. 50-62) In another paper, "Consciousness and the World in Advaita Vedānta." (Puligandla, 1992b) Puligandla argues that the concept of *anirvacanīya* does not violate the laws of logic, as some scholars claim. Many argue that the Advaitins' view that the world is neither real nor unreal violates the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle. By applying De Morgan's law, Puligandla argues that the Advaitins' definition of anirvacanīya contains no logical inconsistency.

Puligandla believes that Śaṃkara's interpretation remains closest to the Upaniṣadic texts themselves. (Puligandla, 1992, p. 50) According to him, the main drift of the Upaniṣad is that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is non-dual. This means nothing can exist apart from Brahman, and nothing can exist beside Brahman. This takes us to the question, namely, that if Brahman is the non-dual reality, besides which nothing can exist, how is one to account for the undeniable fact of our experience of plurality, the world of phenomena? How do we account for the problem of one and the many? Puligandla says that Śaṃkara answers the above questions by using the concepts of māyā and adhyāsa. *Adhyāsa*, according to Puligandla, is superimposing on the formless, nameless, non-dual Brahman various forms and names which logically imply judgments of attributes and relation. Puligandla also finds a concept in Kant similar to adhyāsa. He holds that the concept of adhyāsa can arise only from a certain presupposition, and when that presupposition is absent, *adhyāsa* is also absent. Śaṃkara's tradition has the following traits: (1) the obsession with the fact that we are conscious beings, and (2) uncompromising non-dualism. Puligandla asks, namely, if Brahman is formless and nameless, how we experience variety and multiplicity and come to know that variety and multiplicity. He finds the answer in *adhyāsa*. At the same time, he says he is not concerned with how Śaṃkara arrives at the concept of adhyāsa, but with whether this way of looking at *adhyāsa* has a place in Śaṃkara. This is where one can see Puligandla's analytical approach to Śaṃkara.

What matters is that he does not favor any dogmatic defense of Śaṃkara. His claim is as follows: "…the proposition that reality is formless and nameless and non-dual is a necessary condition for the arising of the concept of *adhyāsa,* and where these conditions is not fulfilled, the concept of *adhyāsa* cannot arise." (Ibid., p.52) If the existence of anything at all is certain, beyond any doubt whatsoever, it is *ātman*, according to Śaṃkara. (Ibid. p. 53) Śaṃkara's tradition is, first and foremost, a phenomenological tradition par excellence. By this, Puligandla means that the Upaniṣadic seers and Śaṃkara are not concerned with metaphysics understood as constructing

abstract intellectual systems whose aim is to describe, through categories, what a given thinker takes to be reality; rather, they are primarily phenomenological ontologists. (Ibid., pp. 52-53) Thus, Puligandla clearly states that the transcendental, non-dual reality, which is objectless consciousness, cannot be established through metaphysics but by phenomenological inquiry. Śaṃkara makes an important distinction between the epistemic (i.e., dualistic) and the non-epistemic (i.e., non-dualistic) mode of knowing.

Adhyāsa is an epistemological insight of Śaṃkara. According to this principle, the world that we experience depends on our psycho-physiological conception. This implies that beings constituted differently engage in different kinds of superimposition and, as a result, produce knowledge of this world. "Each kind of being is capable of a certain kind of being's actualize only a part of its potential range of perceptions and conceptions; and at any given time, a given kind of beings actualize only part of its potential range of perceptions and conceptions." (Ibid., p. 54) Thus, the categorical framework, which is both perceptual and conceptual, cannot explain the non-dual Brahman. Brahman must be known only through non-dualistic, non-epistemic ways of knowing. Thus, the principle of *adhyāsa* is irrefutable, and any attempt to refute the principle would presuppose it. Puligandla says that there is no logical or rational way out of it. Superimposition is inseparable from mental modification. Mental modification is a necessary condition for superimposition. *Ātman,* as pure consciousness, objectless consciousness, is attained upon the cessation of mental modifications. Puligandla emphasizes that non-duality is a necessary condition for adhyāsa, and without it, *adhyāsa* cannot arise. But before the non-duality that Puligandla claims as a necessary condition for adhyāsa, other conditions make superimposition possible. In *adhyāsa,* māyā's projective power superimposes the unreal on the real and the not-self on the Self. The conditions necessary for superimposition are as follows: (1) the residual impression brought about by the cognition of a real object, (2) a defect in the object of knowledge, (3) a defect in the cognizer, (4) a defect in the instrument of valid knowledge, and (5) a knowledge of the general nature alone of the substrate without a knowledge of its particularities. (Mahadevan, 1976, p. 243) These five conditions must be considered as more important than the non-duality condition, which Puligandla suggests. The reason is as follows. By rejecting the "unreal" or "not-self," Śaṃkara tries to presuppose the "real" or "Self." Ample empirical evidence shows that it is unreal. In other words, when we distinguish between the unreal and the real, or the not-self and the Self, one is empirical, and the other is transcendental. A wide gap separates these two.

One has a definite proof, and the other is only a presupposition. The ontologies of the unreal and not-self, on the one hand, and real and Self, on the other, are entirely different. There is an ontological shift when Puligandla says that the non-dual nature of Brahman is the necessary condition for *adhyāsa.* Moreover, if we examine the conditions suggested for the possibility of adhyāsa, we see that all of them are purely empirical. Further, one can also argue that the residual impression of the cognition of the real object is one of the essential conditions for *adhyāsa*. Prior knowledge of the real silver is implied in the nacre because silver is superimposed on the nacre. Does duality imply prior knowledge of Brahman's non-dual nature? Silver is superimposed on nacre not by someone who has never seen silver before, but only by someone who has seen real silver somewhere. Can we apply the same criterion to non-duality? If the Brahman-knowledge is already available, then there is no need for any superimposition.

In his interesting paper, "Immanence and Transcendence in the Upaniṣadic

Teaching" (Puligandla, 1997-98), Puligandla examines the view that the Ultimate Reality is both immanent and transcendent. Ultimate Reality, according to him, is at once both immanent and transcendent. Brahman is the power whose varieties of manifestation are the worlds of phenomena within and without the human being. A phenomenon, according to him, is anything that is, or can in principle be, an object of consciousness. Every phenomenon can be assigned either both spatial and temporal coordinates or just a temporal coordinate. This means that what exists is time-bound, and Brahman cannot be a phenomenon because it transcends everything.

Brahman is pure, objectless consciousness, whereas jīva is an object of consciousness, not consciousness itself. According to Puligandla, *ātman* is pure consciousness itself. It is objectless consciousness. Brahman, according to him, is immanent in the sense that all existents and multiplicity manifest Brahman. Similarly, Brahman is transcendent in the sense that Brahman, either as the power whose manifestations are the worlds of phenomena or as pure, objectless consciousness, cannot, in principle, be experienced as a phenomenon, an object of consciousness. In the experience of Brahman as transcendent, objectless consciousness is present, and the knower-known distinction is absent. All phenomena, without exception, are reducible to Brahman, which is not itself a phenomenon, says Puligandla. According to him, Brahman, as unmanifest, pure, objectless consciousness, is experienceable when one eliminates all mental modifications. (Ibid., p.15) Puligandla is very correct in saying that in the experience of Brahman as transcendent, there can be no distinctions among the knower, the known, and the act of knowing. These distinctions belong to dualistic ways of knowing, but not to the experience of Brahman, where dualistic understanding is completely absent. According to Puligandla, the terms "mind" and "consciousness" are not the same. Mind is through and through phenomenal, and hence an object of consciousness, whereas consciousness is not a phenomenon and therefore cannot have any structure. Consciousness is formless and nameless.

When everything that can be thought away is thought away, what remains is pure, objectless consciousness, the ultimate residue, says Puligandla. Consciousness is a necessary being, whereas objects of consciousness are contingent beings. Is this notion of consciousness suggested by the Advaitins and supported by scholars like Puligandla acceptable? Let us briefly discuss this point. Puligandla analyses the notion of consciousness to argue that consciousness can exist without objects or things. But for thinkers like Husserl and Sartre, consciousness is always consciousness of something. The question is this: whether consciousness can be non-intentional? Since consciousness cannot be empty, it must always be relational and hence intentional. Bare consciousness, devoid of objects, is unimaginable. It is always related to some object or other. The uniqueness of consciousness is this "to-relation," which the Advaitins have not taken seriously. Moreover, if consciousness were something that exists apart from myself, independent of my own, then one can always question the validity and the use of such consciousness. Śaṃkara might say that consciousness is the basis of proof, and so it is established prior to the process of proof. "The Self does not wait on a means to know it", says Śaṃkara. But this does not solve the problem. Here, one would say that Rāmānuja's position is preferable to Śaṃkara's, mainly because Rāmānuja admits that consciousness is always relational. Because consciousness is always related to objects, intentionality is the fundamental characteristic of consciousness. Otherwise, consciousness becomes abstract and not useful for our experience of the empirical world. Advaita, which supports the philosophy of consciousness, is caught up in a logo-centric bias, and many modern thinkers in the West have argued for moving away from it.

Puligandla argues that Brahman is not a substance. To support this, he says substance is a category, a name; if Brahman is nameless, how can we describe Brahman as a substance? Categories, subsistence, etc., are applicable only to manifest Brahman, to phenomena. Substance involves attributes, and Brahman is devoid of attributes;

hence, Brahman is not a substance. Also, substance refers to time and time-bound existence, and everything that exists is subject to change. Brahman is beyond time and hence cannot be reduced to a substance. This can also be explained by the viśeṣana-viśeṣya sāmānādhikaraṇya. This is a coordinate relation involving substance-attributes; for example, in the sentence, "*nīlamutpalam,*" the two words, "*nīlam*" and "*utpalam*" convey different meanings—the former signifies a color characterized by the quality of blueness (*nīlatva*) while the latter, a substance possessing the property of lotusness (*utpalatva*). The relation between the two words is that of viśeṣana and viśeṣya, i.e., qualification and the qualified. This type of *sāmānādhikaraṇya* cannot be used to interpret the *mahāvākya* like "*tat tvam asi*" because the words "*tat*" and "tvam" do not involve any viśeṣana-viśeṣya relation. Thus, one can explain the view that Brahman is not a substance.

According to Puligandla, Upaniṣadic teaching is a thoroughgoing reductionism. Of course, he says this differs from all other forms of reductionism. According to him, the Advaita-reductionism reduces all varieties of phenomena to Brahman, which is not itself a phenomenon. He further says that Advaita Vedānta's reductionism is not empirical reductionism but the reduction of all phenomena to transcendental Brahman. It is not that all phenomena are reducible to Brahman, but their very being is always the transcendental Brahman. Puligandla says that the *mahāvākya*, "All this is Brahman," implies that whatever exists is Brahman and nothing other than Brahman exists. This may seem to support Puligandla's claim that Advaita is reductionist, but calling it reductionism seems problematic. Śaṃkara moves from the empirical to the transcendental, not *vice versa*. In such a philosophy, reductionism cannot exist. After showing the limitations or the unreality of the empirical, he moves towards the transcendental to show that Brahman is non-dual and supreme. Thus, for Śaṃkara, the proof of his thesis lies largely in the empirical world, and Advaita cannot support reductionism in any form.

On language, Puligandla makes an interesting distinction: the conceptual and non-conceptual uses of language. Conceptual language is descriptive and informative, whereas non-conceptual language is motivational and evocative. It is a mistake to think that the *Upaniṣads* explain some facets and descriptions of Brahman. This distinction, according to Puligandla, is similar to that of the distinction between a pundit and a guru. A pundit, he says, is concerned with imparting information, whereas the guru is concerned with the disciple's enlightenment. His position clearly shows the limits of language as a description. Puligandla considers language as the prime instrument of superimposition. He believes that when one fully and thoroughly disengages oneself from superimposition—from language—one opens oneself to the experience of Brahman. This disengagement is "desuperimposition", says Puligandla. This desuperimposition is nothing short of rejecting all theories of reality as positively misleading and woefully inadequate for realizing Brahman. He makes it clear that one should be free from the delusion that one can comprehend and experience Brahman through language.

In this context, Puligandla compares Derrida's Deconstruction with the *Upaniṣads* and Śaṃkara. He contends that both conceptual oppositions, the warp and woof of language, obstruct our experience of the real. It is only by overcoming these obstacles -the trap of language- that we experience the real. Does this mean Derrida and Śaṃkara share the same views? Puligandla says they differ in how they overcome obstacles. According to the *Upaniṣad* and Śaṃkara, one overcomes this obstacle through total, full, and complete transcendence of language, but for Derrida, within language. Further quoting Harold Coward, Puligandla argues that, for Derrida, there is no experience outside language, and that experience can occur even when language is absent.

"Whereas for Derrida there is nothing outside of language or text, for Śaṃkara, there is nothing of the text left in the *anubhava* experience. The text is the subject that the Upaniṣadic *neti neti* cancels out to enable the real to be known." (Harold. 1990, p. 97) Puligandla argues that Derrida's deconstruction is not the same as Śaṃkara's desuperimposition. He claims that desuperimposition is surely deconstruction: a thorough dissembling with no reminder to emphasize one concept over another. Desuperimposition is a sufficient condition for deconstruction, but not *vice versa,* says Puligandla. He further argues that both Derrida and Śaṃkara have understood the trap of language that must be overcome: Śaṃkara through total transcendence of language, whereas Derrida through his continual engagement in deconstruction. Puligandla concludes that for Śaṃkara, the purpose of the text is not to inform and describe but to inspire and motivate one to quest for Brahman. Śaṃkara 's way of experiencing reality is through total transcendence of language and thought, where there is neither identity nor difference.

Thus, Puligandla's approach to Advaita philosophy is unique and revelatory. The brief study above explains how he has used analysis to understand Advaita. It also tells us that analysis is not alien to Indian tradition. In Indian tradition, the term "analysis" is used more broadly, and special importance is given to reasoning and valid argumentation. Indian philosophy is analytical on its own terms, and in certain cases, the analytical rigor of Indian thinkers seems more profound, as Puligandla's writings clearly exhibit.

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