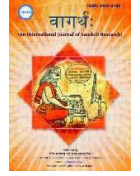




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The Hermeneutic Exposition of Asparśayoga in Gaudapādakārikā

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Abstract: The term 'Asparśayoga' forms the core of Gaudapādakārikā, a philosophical text, authored by Vedāntin Gaudapāda. Etymologically, 'a' stands for 'not' and 'sparśa' for touch, so, it means "without any touch". It is free from touch with object. The term object means physical (tables, chairs etc.) as well as mental (desires, volitions etc.). This "non-touch" is also applicable to the non-existing entities i.e. son of barren women, sky- lotus etc. When the appearance of all kinds of objects in mind cease to exist, the realization of pure, untainted self (Ātman) happens. In this paper, the two interpretations of the term-'Asparśayoga'- will be explained, which will serve the metaphysical, epistemological and axiological purposes.

First, this can be interpreted as something without the touch of mind, senses and object. Here, the mind is not a sense organ but vritti. The first interpretation describes the self as something which transcends mind, senses and object. This consists of two stages. By transcending the first stage, that is conjugation of mind, sense and object, one realizes the second stage that is self. Thus, first interpretation involves epistemological process as well as metaphysical reality.

The second interpretation is a corollary of first one. The nature of self-defined as something without the touch of mind, senses and object leads to another aspect of self that is 'bliss'. This bliss is purely metaphysical, where self has an independent existence. Bliss is also defined as a state of absence of both pleasure and pain. This state of bliss is nothing but Brahman.

Keywords: Pure Consciousness, phenomenal consciousness, deep sleep, self-luminosity, bliss.

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of 'Asparśayoga' or pure psyche has a sense of historicity. The cosmogonical notion of universe found in the vedas, asserts that the reality behind this universe must be conscious being, for it is capable of being an agent of this world. This cosmogonical idea shifts into the psychological idea, where it is argued that the self we possess, has some affinity with that cosmogonical being. The self, with which we deal in this world, is phenomenal consciousness and the seers of the Upaniṣads have proved the existence of consciousness with various arguments and analogies, which have been blended with their personal experiences. Gaudapāda denotes the pure consciousness with the word 'asparśa'. This is the principal purport of Advaita in general and according to Gaudapāda in particular.

The phrase 'without any touch' raises a question: what is that which is free from any touch (Asparśa) and what is the nature of reality? Self cognizes an object through mind and the senses, in the process of getting knowledge. This is the process through which the world of phenomena is perceived. According to Gaudapāda, this "perceived phenomena" is not the reality, which is beyond the triple conception of time, i.e. present, past and future. When the Self becomes free from the cognitions, it gets its own real nature: untainted, unstained and untouched. Sankara further explains it "it (Self) is free from all touch implying any relations with objects".[1]

In the philosophy of Gaudapāda, the term 'Asparśayoga' has a unique and significant expression. There is a contradiction in this term, 'asparśa' means 'without any touch' and 'yoga' means 'to unite, to join, to merge'. When consciousness is free from any of the worldly object, it unites with the ultimate reality, which is called Brahman. According to Gaudapāda,

II. ASPARŚAYOGA AS REALITY

even this unification is secondary, for there is no difference between the individual and the universal consciousness.

One more aspect in describing Asparśayoga is the 'theory of non-mind'. In the process of perception, the mind plays a pivotal role in Advaita generally speaking and Gaudapādakārikā in particular. In philosophy, the word mind has two meanings:

1. It is a sense organ, instrument of knowledge.
2. It is *cittavṛiti*.

Here, it is the second meaning with which we are concerned. In Gaudapādakārikā, mind is not a sense organ but *vṛiti*. Although Gaudapāda does not use the word *vṛiti*, but the analyses of the *kārikās* show that the nature and explanation of mind is identical with *vṛiti*, a term which has amply been used by later Advaitins. From Gaudapāda's standpoint, this mind is the source of all duality. He states "All these dual objects, comprising everything that is movable and immovable, are perceived by the mind" [2]. The variegated world is a consequence of the activity of mind. In the fourth book of Gaudapādakārikā, Gaudapāda calls it "citta spandana", the vibration of mind. Śankara, appending on it, states "all *dvayam*, duality; *grāhya-grāhakavat*, possessed of subject and object; is *cittaspaṇḍitam eva*, surely a vibration of consciousness. But from the ultimate standpoint, *cittam*, consciousness, is nothing but the Self..."[3]

Gaudapāda uses the word *citta*, *manas* and *viñāna* synonymously. When these are limited with adjuncts, the generation of world of plurality takes place. But when it ceases to act, the generation of this world stops. This is called "asparśayoga", when the activity of mind ceases, the mind becomes non-mind, which is the state of ultimate reality, as *kārikākāra* asserts "duality is never experienced, when the mind ceases to act."[4]

The dual state of mind is apparently the real phenomenon. One gets the illusion of a snake in the rope lying in the darkness; however, it is not the snake but rope in reality. The two are actually identical. This cognitive error is due to ignorance. Gaudapāda calls this ignorance *māyā*. *Māyā* plays an important role in his philosophy. He explains the unreality of this world through the concept of *māyā*. To show the function of mind and nature of ignorance, Gaudapāda asserts "as in dream the mind acts through *māyā*, presenting appearance of duality, so also in the waking state, the mind acts through *māyā*, presenting the appearance of duality" [5]. *Māyā* is the power, which is the cause of this phenomenal world. Defining *māyā*, Professor Hajime Nāmākura states "*manas* has *māyā* as the basis of its potentiality and is established by the concealment of *Ātman* itself which is the Absolute Truth" [6].

Another point that merits attention in this regard is that to establish the falsity of this world. Gaudapāda gives two reasons: in dream, the objects are "within the body" and "too far to reach because of time hindrance". It is impossible for external objects like, table, chair to find or occupy space inside the body. Secondly, for the dreamer, dreaming objects are too far to capture through the senses. By these two reasons, we can infer that mind, in waking as well as in dreaming states, assumes the shape of an object. This is called *cittavṛiti* in Advaita Vedānta and in Gaudapādakārikā *cittaspaṇḍan*, vibration of mind. It can be concluded by these two reasons that the external

world is not real. This is illusion and hindrance to the real nature of the soul. When the vibration of mind is controlled through various methods, the soul comes into its true nature, without any relations with object. This '*asparśayoga*' draws equivalence with the Yoga concept of '*cittavṛitinirodha*'.

While discussing about *cittavṛiti*, it is important to note that in the philosophy of Gaudapāda, he regards the *cittavṛiti* in deep sleep also. He states that deep sleep contains impressions (*vāsanā*). Gaudapāda argues that the real nature of consciousness lies beyond the deep sleep and that is Turiya. Turiya encompasses all these three states and yet is more pervasive than all of them. The word *asparśya* cannot be held to be related to deep sleep but Turiya. In the theory of four states of consciousness, one is able to realise the pure consciousness through the method of inwardization.

The perception of duality (vibration of mind) is not real in the first three states. It is rather an illusion. When the ignorance of duality or touch disappears, true nature of self gets illuminated. It does not require any other instrument or object to illumine it, like the sun or the lamp. This self-illuminates, untouched self is the only reality in Gaudapāda's philosophy.

III. ASPARŚYAYOGA AS BLISS

Theory and practice should go hand in hand. It should resolve practical problems and satiate the human desires to be free from pain and sufferings. In Indian philosophy, ontology, epistemology and ethics are interwoven in a thread. The non-mindness is not merely an ontological theory but also has a practical soteriological bearing. After realizing the state of non-mind, the self illuminates in itself. Advaita asserts that this mindlessness, free from any touch with objects is 'bliss'. Swami Nikhilānand explains *asparśayoga* as "a spiritual discipline which does not admit of relations or touch with anything else" [7]. This "spiritual discipline" draws equivalence with soteriological aspect where mind is free from attachments and desires.

There is a difference between the ordinary experience of pleasure and Bliss. It is accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy that as long as we are in this world or having interactions with this world, we undergo pleasure and pain, which is a necessary condition of being attached with the world. So, to be free is to go beyond these experiences and that state is defined by Advaitin as 'Bliss'. Pleasure is a quality; it is acquired through interactions with the world. Nature of the acquired pleasure is mixed with pain and is perishable. But bliss is eternal, *sama*, *samatā* or *sambhāva* as Gita defines it.

One question arises in this case: is Bliss a state or an attribute of the soul? Advaitin argues that Bliss is neither a state nor an attribute of soul. Otherwise it would be an object of knowledge; hence divisible. But soul or *brahman* is without any parts. It is said in the Brahmaśūtra that brahman is beyond the division of *Sajātīya*, *vi-jātīya* and *svagata bheda*. "Brahman is not *ānandin*, possessing bliss, but *ānanda*, bliss itself" [8] as Paul Duessen states. So, bliss is not a quality but the essence of the soul.

Second question that arises is- if it is not an attribute or state, then how do we know it. Advaitin argue that in the real nature of *ātman*, the distinction of knower, knowledge and means of knowing comes to an end. The self-enlightens in itself. This self-luminosity cannot be known through any *pramāṇa*; means

of knowledge but directly experienced, as argument of Bhāratīrtha, goes “our happiness and misery, however, are not known by inference; both their and absence are directly experienced. In the same way, the absence of all misery is directly experienced in deep sleep and since their opposites to bliss, their total absence unhindered bliss which has to be accepted as our experience” [9].

The *ānanda* and the self are not two different aspects of reality but identical. When self gets dissociated from all the desires, miseries and happiness etc. is called *asparśa* by Gaudapāda. In Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, the desireless self is compared with supreme aesthetic pleasure, as passage runs “that is his form-beyond desires, free from evils and fearless. As a man, fully embraced by his beloved wife, does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this infinite being (self), fully embraced by the supreme self, not know anything at all, either external or internal. That is his form-in which all objects of desire have been attained and are but the self, and which is free from desire and devoid of grief” [10]. In the same vein, Taittiriya upaniṣad (2.8) states that the *śrotriya* (well versed in the Vedas) and *akāmaḥetu* (desireless) attains the *brahman* bliss.

Mind is always distracted from worldly pleasures and desires. Hence, to bring the mind under control, Gaudapāda describes some means to follow:

1. Remembering that all is misery (*sarvam duhkhamanusmṛtya*)
2. Through the exercise of discrimination.

In Advaita, hearing, contemplation and repeated practice are necessary. To achieve bliss, two things are required, as Paul Deussen remarks, “the removal of all desires and the removal of the consciousness of plurality. First is attained by means of *Sanyāsa* and second by *Yoga*” [11]. One should always remember that all this desire is misery and through the discrimination of consciousness of plurality, one is able to unchain the trammels and fetters of this worldly suffering. Through this, one can detach oneself from pain and suffering.

In Gita when Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa a question “Varily, the mind, O Kṛṣṇa, is restless, turbulent, strong, and unyielding; I regard it quite as hard to achieve its control, as that of the air” (*Cañcalaṃ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavat dr̥ḍham/ tasyāham nigrahaṃ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram*. Gītā, 1V-34). In the very next verse, Kṛṣṇa answers succinctly “Without doubt, O mighty-armed, the mind is restless and difficult to control; but through practice and renunciation, O son of Kuntī, it can be achieved” (*Asaṃśayam mahābāho mano durnigrahaṃ calaṃ/ abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gr̥hyate*. Gītā, VI-35). When mind is under control, the worldly pleasure and pain etc. do not touch the mind, as a result mind does not suffer and becomes free.

It is to be noted in this connection that the word ‘*nisaṃga*’ has been used in fourth book of Gaudapādakārikā and it has a connotation “a non-attached thing”, a thing which has no relation to anything else, meaning independence. Here, *asparśayoga* can be interpreted as the self, unattached from worldly pleasure and pain. Gaudapāda says “fearlessness, the removal of misery, knowledge (of the self), and everlasting peace are dependent on the control of the mind” (*Manaso nigraḥāyattamahayam sarvayoginām/ dukhākṣyah prabodhaścāpyakṣayā śāntireva ca*. Kārikā III- 40). This state

of mind has been called “bliss” (*ānanda*), “non-dual” (*advaya*), etc. Bliss has a unique meaning from the ordinary uses. In general, the meaning of *ānanda* is pleasure. But in Advaita, it means when self is not tainted with pleasure and pain. Since pleasure has always suffering and mixed with pain. The enjoyment of pleasure has been seen as misery. So, this pleasure is not, what philosophers are looking for. For them, *ānanda* is free from all attachments and desires.

Duality is perceived when the mind acts, that is to say (activity, i.e. the *vrittis* of the) mind is withdrawn from itself by the knowledge arrived at through discrimination, repeated practice and renunciation ...like the disappearance of the snake in the rope...or during deep sleep.

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