Doctrine of Adhyasa: A Philosophical Study

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Abstract

Adhyasa is a logical doctrine, not a psychological doctrine. Sankara aspires to advance that; two contradictory elements cannot be together in a propositional form. The Subject and the Predicate evolve from two distinctive realms. They have contrasting characteristics as well. When we are not cognizant of the syllogistic discrepancy between the subjects and predicate then we make this error of misrepresenting Adhyasa as a psychological point rather than a logical point. We too must bear in mind that, the subject signifies particularity and the predicate universality in which universal is predicated upon the particular. Furthermore, there is an apparent distinction between the subject and the predicate. The subject continues the same whereas the predicate changes. As a matter of fact, the first section of the essay will define and elucidate the key concepts and expressions used in the arguments. The second section will explain the three fundamental statements of Sankara, which are misconstrued as an explanation of the psychological foundation. The third section will conceptually assess as to on what ground Sankara should be studied as a logician in his argumentative demonstration of Adhyasa rather than a psychologist.

KEYWORDS: Avidya, Upanishads, Advaita Vedanta, Morality, Indian Philosophy, Atman

Introduction

Adhyasa is a logical doctrine, not a psychological doctrine. Sankaracharya aspires to advance that; two contradictory elements cannot be together in a propositional form. The Subject and the Predicate evolve from two distinctive realms. They have contrasting characteristics as well. When we are not cognizant of the syllogistic discrepancy between the subjects and predicate then we make this error of misrepresenting *Adhyasa* as a psychological point rather than a logical viewpoint (Mishra, 1994). In a syllogism, when we propose, A is B or Snow is white – we should apprehend that the subject and predicate are two segments of the same syllogism. We too must bear in mind that, the subject signifies particularity and the predicate universality in which universal is predicated upon the particular. Furthermore, there is an apparent distinction between the subject and the predicate. The subject continues the same whereas the predicate changes. For instance, the water is cold. Here, the water remains the same but the predicate can either be cold or hot that might change from time to time, depending on the facts (Misra, 1990).

Outline of the Paper

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will define and elucidate the key concepts and expressions used in the arguments. Secondly, I will explain the three fundamental statements of Sankara, which are misconstrued as an explanation of the psychological foundation. In the third part, I will conceptually assess as to on what ground we should study Sankara as a logician in his argumentative demonstration of *Adhyasa* rather than a psychologist who is sentimentally invoking to memory to make his timeless point that was to realise the Brahman.

Elucidation of Key Concepts

Subject: An agent or a thing about which something is otherwise predicated in a proposition.

Predicate: That part of proposition which systematically exhibits the logical relations between the subject and the content of ascription.

Adhyasa: Super imposition- It is the apparent presentation to consciousness, by way of remembrance of something previously observed in some other thing.

Exposition of the Doctrine Predication

Statement-1

Sritirupah paratra purvadrista avabhasah: This statement is the most important of all. Through this theory, Sankara wishes to clarify that he does not mean by *Adhyasa* a psychological error. But he meant it as a logical error. By spirit based reading, we often mean that it is about memory; it is about the recollection of the past, hence it is psychological. Here there has to be a distinction made between the logical error and psychological error. This statement of Sankara has been misinterpreted as a psychological issue. That is not true and a plausible understanding of the concept of adhyasa. A serious analysis will help us to understand that it is a logical and a linguistic error. 'Purvadista' does not mean mental images. 'Smritirupah' does not indicate a psychological process. Various commentators of Advaita have made a hermeneutical error in the interpretation of these two statements of Sankra. The word 'avabhasa' has been misinterpreted. Often many of the commentators feel that avabhasa simply means images or the reflection of the object of knowledge. That is not the right understanding indeed. Because when a concept is transformed into another it does not become a psychological issue. For instance, when rope appears as snake or shell appears as silver, it is not at all a psychological case. It is about logical shifting and syllogistic modification. That has to be very clear.

Vachaspati Misra stated that one predicate is sublated by another. One predicate is replaced by another. In fact, Avabhasa has a scope for connection or modifications of the predicate. Predicate can be corrected in case of its error.

Sankara is a logical philosopher who logically states concepts and arguments. He does not attempt to identify one moon with multiple moons; nor does he attempt to

misinterpret the phenomena of neither a rope for snake nor a shell for silver. This predication does not mean a psychological case but a logical case. When a judgment is made we try to apply the previously observed cases in an order to apply the previous instance to a current case. This instance may involve some sort of 'memory' to recollect the previous instance of knowledge. However, this is not at all, a case in which a psychological enterprise has come to play in the making of the argument. Yes, adhyasa involves memory but it is not an exact case of memory.

Statement-2

Anyasya anyadhrma avabhasatam (perceiving a form which is the form of another): The second statement is the extension of the first statement. This statement affirms as to how Adhyasa can happen in the case even when a thing is described by another thing or when a thing is cognized by the form of another thing or object (Hospers, p. 536). This transferable relation in cognition also said to hold a case of Adhyasa. Sankara asserted that the qualities of a predicate cannot be implied to 'atman'- the reason is: predicate is a part of another realm. This proposition falsifies many other general statement of judgment. When we judge we do have the scope for misjudgement, because when we apply descriptive words or facts that always involves error and misjudgement. It has to be pointed out that in every case of judgment there is also a possibility of misjudgement as well. Sankara illustrates this stamen with the example of rope and snake; silver and shell. Therefore we need not to be surprised when Sankara said that all judgments are subject to some elements of factual error. Predicates need not be facts always predicate are ideas as well. Hence due to the easy application and modifications of the predicate, the ideas can wrongly or rightly be applied. Vachaspati Misra viewed, "The different manner in which a predicate term and a subject term may meet each other in different times implies the ascribing of a character to the subject and such characterization is not free from mischaracterization" (Hasurkar, 1999). As far as language is concerned, when a subject remains the same, at the same time one predicated can be replaced by the other predicate even in the same scenario. It has to be seriously understood that by affirming one predicate we necessarily deny the other predicates; even then, the subject remains the same. However, subject, 'I', 'this' or 'Mr. Ganguly' cannot be replaced at the same time. This is the reason the Advaitins state that 'I', 'Ganguly' are the logical subjects, its usage is logically different; because it has logical norms, the subject has to adhere to that whereas a predicate is not subject to a rule; hence, the predicate is free-floating. Let's take another example- I cannot say that 'I am a bus'; I have to say 'this is a bus'. Subject always operates under a specific norm and definite idiom; whereas, a predicate does not have to (Ibid).

Statement-3

Atsamin Tadbudhi (Erroneous identification of subject and predicate): The third statement is the culmination of the first and the second statements. This is the concluding remark of Sankara on Adhyasa (Ibid). This statement states that it is wrong to identify subject with the predicate. In propositional form, we put together both the subject and the predicate in an identifying manner. There are several ways we can misidentify the subject with the predicate. Sankara elaborates that wrong identification through examples. At times we make a logical mistake by attesting physical qualities to atman or subject. We

say, "my uncle, my aunt, my pen and so forth". We too often attest to some organic qualities like fatness, beauty, lameness etc. - especially when we say, "I am lame, I am handsome". We also attest to certain mental qualities to the Atman, when we say, "I decided, I doubt". This is how we attest the wrong predication to the Atman or the subject. Atman cannot be explained in language. When we explain Atman with the help of certain physical or mental qualities then we make mistake. By now we know that Sankara is not concerned with errors emanating from facts but from logic and language- that precisely is the concern of philosophy. Pof. G. Misra emphasized language as the source of error. He points out, "Language represents the real as what it is not. It gives the idea of a thing which is foreign to it. It brings the characteristics which are not there in the thing itself". Linguistic error can either validate or invalidate a statement. The analytic philosophy has helped us understand that the main job of philosophy is to clarify and analyse language. If we do so, much of the conceptual problems are out of dilemmas that could hinder in the theoretical evaluation or rationalization process (Bhattacharya, 1975).

After having conceptually analysed the nature of Adhyasa through Sankaa's three fundamental statements we come to understand that Adhysa is a logical error. In the following section I will attempt to investigate the area, which tends to allure us to think that Adhyasa is psychological one.

Philosophical Evaluation of Adhyasa

Sankara's treatment of error (adhyasa) is throughout taken in this traditional interpretation as something psychological (P. Geach an Max Black, 1952). The concept of adhyasa is made intelligible through the instances of empiric illusions like the shell-silver, the double moon, etc,. And because of the analogies of the shell-silver, etc., are given, it is taken for granted that adhyasa is nothing but an illusion. And as such the eternal adhyasa of not-self over self is also an ease of illusion in the same psychological sense. But if one carefully goes through the whole Adhyasa-bhasya one can clearly find that Sankara here never raises a point which is of psychological in character"(Ibid). The problem of error, that he raises, is not psychological but purely logical. In the very beginning of this bhasya, Sankara points out that all our concepts which are distinct and different are precluded from any possibility of a combination. Any attempt of curtaining the distinct and different concepts results in a coupling of true and false. Any coupling of the concepts likes 'you' and 'I' do great violence against all the accepted principles of logic. The coupling of true with false is itself unreal. But since no linguistic expressions are possible without joining ideas which are distinct and different, language by its very nature necessarily falsifies the real.

Samkara's definition of adhyasa "Smrtirupah paratra purvadrstababhasah" has been usually translated as "the apparent presentation, in the form of remembrance to the consciousness of something previously observed, in some other thing". Here the term 'remembrance' has been understood in the sense of memory to exclude cases like recognition. The term 'rupiah' is translated here as a likeness. That means the adhyasa is not exactly identified with memory but is similar to memory. But here it may be pointed out that 'rupah' in Samkara Vedanta has been usually understood as not similarity but as mere form (e.g.nama-rupah as names and forms){Ibid}. Sankara, by the phrase 'smrtl-

rupah' does not compare adhyasa with Smriti but suggests that erroneous cognition, in so far as it is cognition, is bound to take certain forms into account.

To put the issue more elaborately, while in an illusion somebody perceives the 'shell' as the 'silver' he neither takes the 'silver' as something which he has perceived before nor again he takes it as something completely new, in the sense of not having any trace of it from before. Unless he applies the universal or class! Characteristic of a silver hood to the referent of the present cognition at issue he can never judge the preset referent as silver. In order to cognise it to be silver; he is bound to apply the form of memory. It is, in this sense, the memory which is absolutely essential for all cognitions. No cognition whether erroneous or no erroneous can be possible without taking the universal forms into considerations. And it is the memory which is the bearer of all such forms.

From this point of view not only to cognise the present object as 'silver', but also to cognise it as 'shell' becomes possible by taking memory into its fold. In both the cognitions, memory plays its role by supplying the forms. And since these forms are not in the external referent but are applied to it from within, the referent is never cognised as it is but always as something already conceptualised. The bare referent is never known. All that is empirically known is only the conceptualised referent. It is, in this sense, hot only the 'silver-cognition' is erroneous but also the 'shell-cognition' is erroneous. In other words, here Sankara, like many other Indian Philosophers, is clearly not interested in discussing the psychological problem of accounting empirical errors like an illusion, hallucination and dream. His primary concern is only to explicate the logical structure of the concept of error.

If in erroneous cognition, an error is due to the presence of concepts and forms etc. Then the non-erroneous cognition also being involved with concepts, etc., cannot logically be said ns sacrosanct. That Sankara is not interested in erroneous perception but only analyses the concept of error becomes fully evident when in Adhyasa-bhasya he declares all types of ordinary knowledge as cases of superimposition of one concept (self) over the other concept (not-self). Since no linguistic judgement is possible without employing concepts and universals, judgement, as such, is said to be inadequate in comprehending the nature of the read, referent. All empirical judgements are descriptive and as such these are likely to state more than what the referent actually is.

It is to be marked here that the modern analytical philosopher also recognises like Sankara that "there is no class of descriptive statements which are incorrigible" (Dr.G.lisra, 1969). Therefore these judgements are not dependable. In all such judgements, the predicate is different from the subject. And once the difference between the subject and the predicate is allowed, the possibility of error cannot be ruled out.

Hence Sarakara's main interest is to disparage all the empirical, judgements that are descriptive in character and he seems to have approved the none empirical pure demonstrative expressions of identity like 'This is this' where no difference between the subject and the predicate is admitted. The identification expressions are given superior status over the relational expressions (samsafgabaeahi vakyas) which relate one thing not to the same thing but to the other, are expressions where differences are drawn and thus there is pure identity.

But philosophers' search for pure demonstrative use of expressions in language is not found to be very much fruitful. "Purely demonstrative expressions are in their way secure; but only because the information which they give is vanishingly small" (Das, 1933). It is, however, also true that Sankara does not sanction absolute logical security to these demonstrative expressions. His fundamental aim is not to find out a catalogue of merely verbal tautologies and demonstrative expressions but to point out the limitations of the conceptual element which is logically inseparable from any linguistic expression. As such even the identification expression 'A is A' cannot be finally upheld from the Advaintic logical point of view-because here also there is at least a logical difference between the first 'A' (subject) and the second 'A' (predicate).

Hence the move Sankara takes is the very denial of the linguistic expression itself. 'A is A' is, no doubt, better than A is B' or 'A is C' and in that sense, it is nearest to the truth but yet ultimately it also likes others fails to reach the goal. The logical conclusion to which the Advaita is led is the very criticism of the use of language. Hence it seems evident that Sankara's prime interest is to investigate the logical condition of error as such. Since all empirical judgements are involved with conceptualisation, relation and descriptions, these are all falsification in character from the logical point o view. That Sankara is only interested in the conceptual analysis of error becomes very much clear when in the Adhyasa bhasya, the opponent raises the objection that adhyasa is possible only in respect of the perceptible object, Sankara resorts saying that there are no such rules as that. The judgements like 'The sky is dim' is made when people superimpose dimness upon the sky x-which is n a perceptible object.

Sankara's point is that attribution of general characteristics goes counter to the uniqueness of the thing described. Description of the unique referent by means of a rupah is avidya (Misra, p. 1-5). His proposal is that language cannot represent the uniquely real and that true knowledge consists in knowing the unique. Brahma-Jnana consists in knowing a thing as it is.

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, this paper has attempted to highlight on the debated issue of the logical study of Adhyasa. Logical method has beautifully supported the central issue of Advaita, which is Adhyasa. The traditional philosophers while translating the word Adhyasa into English, defined adhyasa as superimposition. According to these philosophers, one ultimate reality is appearing in many in the same way as shell appears as silver. So they say we mistake one ultimate reality as many. However, Sankara had used this as an illustrative of a logical point. Many later understood this as a psychological factor involved in the articulation of these logical examples. It is true that memory is involved in the recollection of previously observed phenomena, yet it is not the exact case of psychological case. The paper has explained how and why this is a linguistic and logical error.

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