

## **Cogito Ergo Sum- A Critical Analysis from Eastern Philosophical Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

In this article I have tried to focus light on Descartes famous dictum 'Cogito ergo Sum', 'I think therefore I am'. And critically analysed it basing on Indian philosophical system, specially the Vedantin view. I have discussed the point that rather saying 'I think therefore I am', we must say 'I am therefore I think', because thought does not proceed the thinker, the thinker precedes the thought. If we are not there the thinking will cease to be there. Moreover in case of doubt, there must be a doubter in order that doubts may be valid, and therefore doubter's existence cannot be doubted-I have also tried to show that thinking implies consciousness if I separate all accretions involved in this consciousness of 'I am', and keep only the bare principle of 'I am', there will be nothing left except a pure feeling and awareness of my being, which resides not merely within me but everywhere; and thus Ātmān or self is pure subjectivity, all-pervading and Absolute-it is Brahmān or Absolute Being. And concluded that the reality of oneself is immutable.

**KEYWORDS:** Brahmān, East, 'I am therefore I think', Self, West.

### **1.Introduction.**

The impulse towards philosophic enquiry arose out of the perception of the wonder of creation. In ancient times, both in the East and the west the philosophic enquiry arose from time to time. The question naturally arise who is responsible for all this wonderment, inside as well as outside? Here logic and equation will not work, because finally the world does not seem to be made out of mathematical and super-logical presentation before us, and the only word we can use to explain this situation is wonder, wonder and wonder! Here philosophic enquiry commences. This is how ancient philosophy started. But in modern times philosophical enquiry seems to start by skepticism and doubting. Thus, considering descarte's view (Rene Descartes, the father of modern western philosophy) We can start our spiritual journey by doubting our own existence, i.e, "doubting my existence". And in my article by doubting my existence I have wonder to reach harmoniously to my spiritual existence as well as Absolute Being.

### **2. Objectives.**

- To critically analyses Descarte's dictum 'Cogito ergo Sum', I think therefore I am.
- To show thinkers precedes the thought.
- To show how consciousness – Ātmān or self is not merely within but also without.
- To show 'I' consciousness is nothing but Brahman, the Absolute.

### **3. Material and Methods.**

This is a descriptive study. It is based on metaphysical view. Some ebooks and articles has been followed to prepare this research paper.

#### **4. Results.**

In this paper I intend to show that in Descartes's famous dictum, 'I think therefore I am', 'I am' is the ultimate doubtless thing. And it is that which precedes thought. And the Absolute Being within oneself is immutable.

#### **5. Discussion**

##### **5.1. Critical analysis of Descartes's dictum.**

We doubt everything. What I am thinking how also may not be free from a doubtful involvement. Let me doubt everything in the world – the world itself, the people around me and myself also.

This question arose in the mind of a great thinker in the west called Rene Descartes. He thought, "I am somehow thinking. Who is thinking? His great dictum was 'Cogito ergo Sum : I think; therefore I am'. But here Descartes made a mistake in his dictum. We 'are' not because we think; we think because we exist. It is the other way round. If we are not there, the thinking will cease to be there. Why do we say, "I think, therefore I am?" We should say, "I am; therefore I think". This is a point which is scored by the Eastern thought over this kind of western thinking.

##### **5.2. Doubting cannot be doubted.**

Doubt is such that which cannot doubt itself. There must be a doubter in order that doubts may be valid and therefore, the doubter's existence cannot be doubted. Thus let us accept that the doubter is there, otherwise it will be such that we are going to cut the branch on which we are sitting, cut off our thought itself, and endeavour to cut off ourselves also. Such thing is not possible. Because behind any skeptical approach there must be wisdom. I have to be there in order to doubt.

##### **5.2.1. Kind of 'I' behind 'my thinking'**

Thinking implies consciousness. I think; that means to say, I am conscious. There is no such thing as unconscious feeling of one's own existence. The feeling of one's existence is a conscious affirmation of being. So, 'I am', because if 'I am not', my investigations and my doubts also vanish simultaneously. So, I have to be.

But the question arise what kind of 'I am'? where am 'I'? If I separate all accretions involved in this consciousness of 'I am', and keep only the bare principle of 'I am', there will be nothing left except a pure feeling and awareness of my being : I am conscious that I am. We cannot say anything else about anything else, because we have already agreed the validity of there being anything outside the consciousness of our being.

##### **5.2.2 'I am' – the ultimate doubtless thing.**

I am conscious that I am. Consciousness is that which is conscious of something other than itself. Thus there must be something of which consciousness should be conscious. Generally we accept an object of consciousness. But here the object has gone. Because the only doubtless thing is that 'I am', and this 'I am' cannot be anything else but a feeling which is identical with awareness, consciousness. A startling conclusion.

### 5.3. Substratum of consciousness.

Generally it is said that physical body is the substratum of consciousness. That is to say consciousness is within me. Here the query arises how can it be within anything? That which is only within is certainly not without. When I say consciousness is within me, I am indirectly assuming that it is not without. But who is saying that consciousness is not without ? only consciousness can say that. It is consciousness itself which says, that, ‘I am inside, I am not outside’.

#### 5.3.1. The feeling of outsideness become a content of consciousness.

In order that the feeling of consciousness that it is not outside, it has to transcend its within-ness, gallop outside the boundary of the body, and feel itself in some other place, where it is denying itself at the same time. Because the feeling of consciousness that it is only inside and not outside is not possible unless it is at the same time outside, so that it may be conscious that it is not outside. But by denying it's absence outside, we are virtually asserting its presence there, because the denial of a thing is not possible unless the denial has already become a content of the denying consciousness. It has to be outside also because if consciousness is only inside your body and not outside, who will know that it is not outside ? There is nothing except consciousness that knows. It is the knowledge. If this principle of knowledge is only inside you and conclude that it cannot be outside, then who will know that it is not outside – except itself ? so the Ātmān, the consciousness, cannot be bound by the body it has limitless, endless expanse. And this seems that ‘I’ consciousness is an endless expanse of being-as-such.

#### 5.4. ‘I’ consciousness is nothing but Brahmañ, the Absolute Being.

In Indian philosophical system the other name of consciousness is Ātmān or self. But we must remember that (as we have discussed earlier). It will be mistaken to say that the Ātmān is inside the body, because the idea of insideness has been ruled out because of the impossibility of that assumption, if the Ātmān is not at the same time outside also.

Thus Ātmān or self is Pure subjectivity, all-pervading and the Absolute, that is to say, it is not merely inside us but everywhere, it is Brahmān or Absolute Being.

### 6. Conclusion

Rene Descartes famous dictum, Cogito ergo Sum, “ I think therefore I am”, leads him and the other western thinkers to equate their identity with their mind instead of with the whole organism. Descartes reality has two fundamental divisions – matter and mind, but mind is in complete control of the whole organism. Thus, the reality is more akin to the spirit rather than the matter. Invariably ‘reason’ is the best instrument to reach the conclusion, ‘Cogito ergo Sum (I think therefore I am),’ which is self evident and has rational basis for all deduction in philosophy. According to Descartes this is a universal and necessary proposition.

But the Vedantin have a reversal opinion of this process of deduction followed by Descartes. Instead of saying “I think therefore I am”, they hold the view “I am, therefore I think”. The self, to the Vedānta, is prior to the act of thinking. As the famous dictum of Śāṅkara goes “no one doubts its own self”, and this is not the result of a chain of reasoning or a deduction from a process of empirical functioning of

thought. Thus the highest consciousness, according to the Vedānta philosophy, is self, and this consciousness is identical with Existence. We cannot make a distinction between Sat (Existence) and Chit (Consciousness) . Thought does not precede the thinker; the thinker precedes the thought and the consciousness of the thinker precedes the fact of his being a thinker.

Thus the Absolute reality, Brahman can be know only in our inwardness, while the outer, and particularly the social, is relegated to an inferior status.

A higher vision and understanding disclose the fact that there is a Supreme end towards which the apparently mechanical operations of matter tend, that the movements of the world are purposive, and that the fulfillment of the phenomena of the world and the individuals is in the final realization of the Absolute. Mechanics is what is seen from a surface-view; as its implication hidden behind sense-perception is the great truth that all change and motion is a yearning to unfold within oneself the reality that is immutable.

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