

Advait Darshan and the pervasiveness of Mahavakya Tattvamasi

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Abstract: Mahavakya Tattvamasi is the Statement of Instruction from the Chandogya Upanishad. It shows the identity between Brahma and Jiva, which is the nerve of Advaita Darshan. It does not remain confine to the traditional texts of Advaita Darshan but also finds its place in the modern ones too. Let us see how the mahavakya Tattvamasi unravels itself in varied forms and names.

Key Words: Mahavakya, Tatvamasi, Advaita, Vedanta, Adi Shankaracharya.

Philosophy is a subject which comes under Humanities, academically. But Philosophy in the real sense transcends and it is more pervasive than just being a subject of Curriculum. In the simplest of its meaning, it can be called 'the way of life.' Here, life does not one confine to the practical realm but also is inclusive of spiritual realm. It encompasses every aspect of a human Mind. If we study Philosophy, systematically, when we commence, we come across its branches. The basic branches are ethics, logic, Metaphysics and Epistemology. Here, ethics is the code of conduct. Ethics is derived from the word 'Ethos.' Logic is a branch where the 'form' is more important than the 'fact.' For example: All Men are immortal. Socrates is a Man. Therefore, Socrates is immortal. Here, despite the argument being factually incorrect, it is logically valid as the form of the argument is sound. It is when the conclusion is followed from the premises.

Metaphysics is the most vital branch of Philosophy. It is called the 'First Philosophy' by Aristotle. We have heard of 'Physics.' It means the scientific study of nature forces such as light, sound, etc. Metaphysics is a combination of two words that is Meta + physics. Here, meta means to 'go beyond'. So we can also comprehend it as something which goes beyond physics is metaphysics. Physics might tell us How? When? Where? but metaphysics can tell us why?

Last but not the least, 'Epistemology' the root word of this is 'Episteme.' It literally means knowledge. Therefore, Epistemology means the theory of knowledge. Here, 'Fact' is very important. Knowledge cannot be false. It has to be true surpassing the boundaries of space and time. Many philosophers have also tried to expound the conditions of knowledge. One of the most significant one is Gettier. According to him, knowledge should have three basic conditions. He called it, 'Justified True Belief.' So anything and everything related to knowledge falls under epistemology. In the *Mimamsa Darshan* of Indian philosophy there is a concept of '*Triputi Samvit*' given by *Prabhakara*. The word 'triputi' means three. It states that the act of cognition includes three factors. The *Jnata*, *Jneya* and *Jnana*. *Kumarila Bhatta* was another *Mimamsak* who advocated another theory known as *Jnatata-vada*. It includes *Pramata*, *Prameya* & *Pramana*.

Ancient tradition of India, is inclusive of many scriptures and these are profoundly studied in Philosophy, considering all their aspects. The scriptures are divided into two categories: *Shruti* and *Smriti*. *Shruti* means revealed scriptures through listening, *Smriti* means remembered scriptures. *Shruti* is eternal, unchanging divine instructions, authorless, direct experience, divinely inspired and on the other hand *Smritis* are divine dialogues, dynamic can be modified and are authored.

Ancient Indian tradition has scriptures like Vedas which are *Shruti* and *Smritis* include Upaveda (medicine and architecture, economics warfare, music and arts) Dharmashastra, Manusmriti,

yadnyawalkya Smriti, Narad Smriti etc. Epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, Puranas which are 18 in number, they are also translated as sacred narrative Shiv Purana, Bhagwat purana, Matsya purana, Markandey Purana to name a few. Last but not the least darshanas often known as shhada-Darshan as they are six in number Nyaya darshan, Vaisheshik darshan, Samkhya darshan, Yoga Darshan, Purv-mimansa and Uttar-mimansa. In Indian philosophy, there are nine schools / darshanas. Shhad Darshan are Vaidik and three are Aavidik. i.e. Jaina, Bauddha and charvaka.

The Vedas are Shrutivakyas and they are Apaurusheya. Vedas are four in number. They are Rig-Veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda and Atharva-Veda. Here, Yajurveda is further divided into two Shukla-Yajurveda and Krishna-Yajurveda. The literal meaning of 'Shukla' and 'Krishna' is 'white' and 'black' respectively. Each Veda has four parts Samhita, Brahmanya, Aranyaka, & Upanishad. Here, Upanishad ending parts of Vedas are also known as Vedanta (*Vedasya antah sa Vedant.*)

The first three belong to the karmakanda portion of Vedas while the upanishad belongs to the jnanakanda. Here, karmkanda means which deals with the rituals and activities. Jnankanda deals with knowledge. The adhara/ substratum of Vedanta is prasthan-trayi this has Upanishad Brahma Sutra and Bhagwad Gita. Upanishad are revelations. Brahamsutras are rationalizations and Bhagwad Gita is the application.

There are 108 Upanishad but 10 are considered major as Adi Shankaracharya has written bhashyas or commentaries on them. The philosophical definition of Upanishad is, '*Upanishadyate prapyate Brahmanidya anaaya iti upanishad*'. It means that by which Brahmanidya can be known and attained is Upanishad. These Upanishads belong to their respective Veda. Aitereya Upanishad is from Rigveda. The Brihadaranyak and Isha belongs to shuklajurveda and Katha belongs to krishnayajurveda. The Mandukya and Kena belongs to the Samaveda and the Mandukya and prashna belongs to the Atharva Veda.

The subject matter of Upanishad is knowledge which they call brahmanidya, the knowledge of the self. This knowledge should be free from bias, opinions, confusions and vagueness.

Each and every Upanishad has a mahavakya in it. Mahavakyas are great utterances or statements. Every Upanishad has a mahavakya. but among these, there are four which are considered the most important.

As we know Mahavakyas are Upanisadic sentences that point out the identity between Atman and Brahman by falsifying the seeming differences that exist between Jiva and Isvara. The knowledge of the Mahavakyas are considered to be the direct means for Liberation. They enable a seeker to arrive at the non dual nature of Self and put an end to bondage by declaring the identity between Atman and Brahman. In Vedantic tradition, one mahavakya from each Veda is taken as a representative of all the mahavakyas of that Veda. There are four Vedas and one statement from each Veda signifies each vakya (statement)

1 Prajanam Brahma-(Consciousness is Brahman)-Aitreya Upanishad-Rig Veda

2 Aham brahmasmi-(I am Brahman)-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad-Yajur Veda

3 Tat Tvam ASI-(That thou art)-Chandogya Upanishad-Sama Veda

4 Ayam atma Brahma-(The Self is Brahman)-Mandukya Upanishad-Atharva Veda

The following short story would expound the implicit meaning of these Mahāvākya very clearly.

A disciple approaches the Guru seeking to understand the ultimate reality. The master then defines the truth as 'Prjñanam brahma' or 'Consciousness is Brahman'. Since this is the mahavakya that defines Brahman, it is called 'laksana-vakya' or statement of definition. The student reflects on this definition and

gets an inkling that Consciousness, the subject, is ever experienced as the I, is what is being pointed out by the teacher as the Truth.

This leads to the student being filled with doubts, as he has always thought that the ultimate truth was something other than himself. He thus, comes back to the teacher for clarification. The teacher then propounds on the second mahavakya, saying that the you the seeker is the sought. This 'Tat vam asi' or 'That Thou Art' is the mahavakya that provides 'upadesa' or 'teaching' and is called 'upadesa vakya' or statement of instruction.

The Vedanta school of Indian Philosophy has five significant schools. They are Advait, Vishishtadvait, Dvait, Dvaitadvait and Shuddhadvait. The acharyas of these schools have encompassed plethora of doctrines and what we comprehend after studying their doctrines is that Vedanta is not a mere word but the essence of mindful living.

If we study Advait Vedanta, Adi Shankaracharya's name is inseparable. But there were other scholars as well. If for instance if we want to talk about, there would be Adi shankaracharya's Guru Govindacharya and his guru was Gaudapada. There are many concepts in advait, which are interconnected in the subtlest manner and later they unravel to us how the concepts can be put to practice and if we do so what drastic changes one can see. The concept of sattatray, Panchkosha, Maya, Brahman, Tatastha Lakshan, Samanya Lakshan, etc. If we know at length and breadth about one concept we must know the others as well because when we try to analyse how they work, we need to have an understanding of an Advaita theory works. It would make no sense if one knows one concept and is totally unaware of the other. Because Advaitic concepts are in sutra form, one needs a proper channel or a medium through which one learns and decodes the real meaning of Advaita.

What is a Sutra?

If want to trace back what sutra means, we need to understand the literary portion of it. It has its base in the Champu Literature which is a mixture of prose and verse.

What does sutra do?

We segregate and separate issues in order to i. remember and they are tightly packed. The definition of sutra is mentioned in Padma Purana and it goes like this.

Alpaksharam(Less Syllables) Asandigdham (Unambiguous) Sarvat (essence/ core) Vishvotmukham (universal) Akshyobhyam (Sutras can't praise) Anavadhyam (Free from blemish.) It does not even allow to have any syntax error or grammatical impurity.

After all this foundational knowledge when one treads on the path of the Advaita and when we study the Mahavakya Tattvamasi in this timeline we come across Vivekachudamani. In this the 50th Chapter is dedicated to the exposition of Mahavakya Tattvamasi. Where in the verse suggests that tattvamasi mahavakya does not declare the literal meaning but the indicative meaning.

But what it connotes is that there is ekya of atman and brahman. The Reality behind the Universe is the same as the reality behind each individual also.

So when we study deeply we understand that there is nothing more fruitful than the application of it. The Verses in vivekachudamani states and explains of what tattvamasi actually connotes. And when we study texts like Brahmasutra, Drg Drshya Viveka and Advait Makarand , we know the instant application.

As Vivekachudamani suggests, that the body or mind cannot be one with brahman, but once when we transcend the panchkosh there is attainment of that goal, similarly when we study Brahmasutra Chatuhsutri we see the division of right discernment and wrong discernment, tatastha lakshana and swaroop lakshana and the most important is the chapter on adhyasa. After knowing what adhyasa is there is a direct enquiry into the Bhrahman. And the sutra goes like, 'Athato Brahma Jigyasa.' (Kasturi Mrig.)

Here we see that when we know that everything we seek outside is everything what we already have.

The Drg Drishya Viveka of Adi Shankaracharya suggests that The seeker is the sought. In tripiti samvit when we see, there is the gyata, gyeya and pramana. But here Drg drishya viveka suggests that the Gyata and Gyeya is the same. In the 14th verse they give an example of the foam in the ocean. Where he says that Creation is the manifestation of names and forms in the Reality which is existence- Consciousness- Bliss, like foam etc. in the ocean.

Similarly, in Advait Makarand, in the second verse Ahamasmi Sadabhami kadachinn ahamapriya, brahammaiva atah siddham sacchidanand lakshanam. It means, I ever exist and I always shine; never do I dislike myself. Therefore, it is established that truth/ brahman, of the nature of Existence-Consciousness- Bliss, alone I am.

This paper helps us identify the real cause of problems around us is exclusivity and Ahamkara. For true knowledge of the Self would induce a sense of inclusivity and as a result, it would help us realize that there would be harmony and mindfulness in living.