

# Symbiosis, Paradoxes, and Dialectics: a Narrative of the Non-Dual Path in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi

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**Abstract** This paper investigates the interplay of language, concepts, and reason in treading the non-dual path of Śāṅkara in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. This paper claims that in order to gain the non-dual insight, the language and concepts in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* require to pass through three intermingling phases, namely, a symbiosis of language and concepts leading to understanding, a paradox of concepts and reality leading to sublation, and a dialectical reasoning on the opposing conceptual categories leading to a meta-language (beyond language, unspeakable) and meta-concept (beyond concept, inexpressible). The reality depicted through language and its nets is an obstruction of the reality per se, and therefore, in the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, language and concepts irreplaceably pass through the phases of symbiosis, paradoxes and dialectics and reveal the reality *sans* language *genus* of worldly enterprises. In this way, in the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, language kicks out itself from the general metaphysical structure to be a scaffolding of the reality per se.

**Keywords** Symbiosis · Paradox · Sublation · Dialectics · Meta-language · Meta-concept

## Introduction

In the history of Indian philosophy, Advaita Vedānta (AV), prompted by its abstruse and enigmatic philosophical insight, has been one of the most intriguing and widely admired schools of metaphysics. AV, as a system of doctrines, rose to prominence by giving solutions

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to a number of existing philosophical and religious problems posed by predecessors of Śaṅkara and his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> In addition to it, its assimilation of significant elements of *upanīṣadic* conception of *Ātman* or *Brahman* that are evidenced in the opening verse of *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* (*BSB*) in the sentence like, “*athāto Brahma-jijñāsā*” (*BSB* I.i.1), makes it a competent and legitimate school to deliberate the meaning of *Brahman* found in the *upanīṣads*.<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara in *BSB* substantiates the purpose of *upanīṣads* as to reveal the non-dual *Brahman* (*BSB* I.i.4),<sup>3</sup> with the *upanīṣadic* statements such as “the knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*” (*BṛU* IV.iii.7).<sup>4</sup> The entire doctrine of Advaita is appropriated in summary form in the *prakaraṇa granthas*, among which the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (*VC*)<sup>5</sup> gets a prominent place. This paper is an attempt to appraise the significance of language, concepts, and dialectical reasoning in treading the non-dual path as propounded in *VC*. The paper argues that reality is *sans* linguistic constructions, and it is unaffected by language game. Language and concepts per se do not reveal reality, although language and concepts constitute a scaffolding for the experience of reality. This paper consists of three parts. The first part of this paper highlights the importance of a symbiotic relation<sup>6</sup> between language and concepts in understanding the basic metaphysical problem of the text. The second part explicates the paradox of concept and reality through various analyses such as rope/snake illusion, silver/nacre illusion, *avasthātraya-viveka*, and *pañcakośa-viveka*, leading up to sublation of each lower concept to the higher concept. The third part points out that in *VC*, constituted by the intermingling of language and concepts resulting into sublation, there evolves a dialectical reasoning (ladder) that identifies a meta-language and meta-concept, which are like a scaffolding for the reality. In the conclusion, the paper says that in the ultimate realization, the language and logic have no place, as the Advaitic end is greater than the sum total of its means.

<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara who had definite and coherent stand on many problems concentrated specially on metaphysical and religious issues. In his *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* (II.I and II), Śaṅkara offers solutions to a number of philosophical problems raised by his opponents, namely, Yoga, Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Jaina, Buddhist, and Bhāgavata. Cf. Devaraja (1970).

<sup>2</sup> *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, Gambhīrānanda Swāmī (tr.), (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), 6.

<sup>3</sup> “*tu tat samanvayāt,*” *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*..., 20–21.

<sup>4</sup> “*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanīṣad*” in *The Upanīṣads: A New Translation*, Nikhilānanda Swāmī (tr.), Vol. 3 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008). Cf. also *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*..., 862.

<sup>5</sup> The question of authorship is a unsettled problem, and the present author considers that any discussion on the authorship is not within the scope of this article. However, this author is in agreement with the contemporary view that upholds the non-dualistic nature of the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. Thus, all references to non-dualism in this text indirectly refer to Śaṅkara, who is the most celebrated proponent of Advaita Vedānta. The author elaborately takes up the issue of authorship in his forthcoming paper titled “Who is the author of *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*?”

The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* or the ‘Crown Jewel of Discrimination’ is in the form of dialogue between a *guru* (teacher) and *śiṣya* (pupil) in which the *śiṣya* humbly approaches the *guru* and having propitiated the *guru* with selfless service (*seva*), implores to be rescued from worldly existence (*samsāra*). The *guru*, having pleased and convinced of the earnestness of the student and his qualifications, promises to teach him the way to liberation (*mokṣa*) which culminates in the ecstatic experience of one’s own self. For details Cf. Grimes (2004).

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Arvind Sharma who has acknowledged same idea in his article on *anubhava* and quoted from Werner (2005). Sharma applies this term in relation to doctrine and experience. But I do not completely agree with the manner in which this word is used by Sharma. According to the present study, experience in Advaita comes only at the later stage, when the doctrines are not recognized. Therefore, according to me, this term should be applied between doctrine and practice or language and concepts. In the present paper, this term refers to the latter.

## I

In the first place, the text *VC* is a philosophical treatise that explains fundamentals of AV in a dialogical form between the *guru* and the *śiṣya*. The author maintains rigorous non-dualism (*advaita*) throughout the text by reiterating that the supreme self alone is real and everything else is false or insubstantial.<sup>7</sup> *Brahman* is the *adhiṣṭhāna* of this universe, for it originates from “it” (*Brahman*). The world is an apparent transformation of *Brahman*, and “*Brahman*, the real itself, is considered as “this” (*idaṃ* signifying the “universe”), while what is superimposed on *Brahman* is merely a name.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, on realization, the individual self (*jīva*) is revealed to be none other than the name and form superimposed on *Ātman/Brahman*, and in the ultimate sense, “the universe does not exist apart from the supreme self.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, teachings of *VC* deal with two main aspects: firstly, it is shown that the non-dual *Brahman* is the sole reality, “one without a second,”<sup>10</sup> and secondly, it is proved that the pluralistic universe of common experience is illusory, false, or deceptive.<sup>11</sup> The foremost philosophical consideration of *VC* is the realization of non-duality in *Brahman* as one without a second.<sup>12</sup> The closest reference to non-duality of *VC* can be seen in *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* of Gauḍapāda which says that “*Brahman* is birthless, sleepless, dreamless, nameless, formless ever effulgent, everything, and a knower” (*MK. III. 36*).<sup>13</sup> The author of the text *VC* expounds this non-dual teaching on *Brahman* as the highest reality by quoting scriptural passages (*VC*: 389,<sup>14</sup> 392,<sup>15</sup> and 405<sup>16</sup>), through analogical reasoning<sup>17</sup> and illustrations.<sup>18</sup> The second consideration that the pluralistic universe is illusory and deceptive is an indirect affirmation of non-duality of *Brahman*. Accordingly, the material universe is completely dependent upon *Brahman* for its existence, although it cannot be said that *Brahman*

<sup>7</sup> “*ataḥ param brahma sad advīṭyaṃ viśuddhaṃ-Vijñāna-ghanam nir-añjanam; praśāntam ādy’anta-vihīnam akriyaṃ niranantar’ānanda-rasa-svarūpam* (Therefore, this universe is the supreme Brahman itself, the real, the one without a second, pure, the essence of knowledge, the taintless, pacified, devoid of beginning and end, beyond activity, the essence of bliss absolute)” (*VC*: 237). Henceforth, for all the quotations on *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, see *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya*, Swāmī Mādhavānanda (tr.), (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2005; first published 1921)..., 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Idam tayā Brahma sadaiva rūpyate, tvāropitaṃ brahmaṇi nāmamātram. VC*: 236.

<sup>9</sup> *Ataḥ pṛthañ nāsti jaganparātmanaḥ*. See verse 235 in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya*, Swāmī Mādhavānanda (tr.) and verse 237 in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda*, Sankaranarayanan (2008).

<sup>10</sup> *samāhitāyāṃ sati citta-vṛttau parāvmani brahmaṇi nirvikalpe; na dṛṣyate kaścid ayaṃ vikalpaḥ prajalpa-mātraḥ pariśiṣyate yataḥ. VC*: 398; see also *VC*: 404, 464–473, and 478.

<sup>11</sup> *dehendriya-prāṇa-mano’ahamādayaḥ; vyomādi-bhūtāny’akhilaṃ ca viśvam avyakta-paryantam idaṃ hy’anātmā. VC*: 122; see also *VC*: 123.

<sup>12</sup> Most of the verses of *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* speak of non-dual *Brahman* as “one without a second.” See the following verses: 110, 237, 238, 251, 252, 266, 351, 353, 354, 362, 377, 393, 397, 399, 400–402, 412, 454, 464–470, 478, 486, 492, 493, 510, 512–516, 523–526, 554, 557, 570, 571, 573, and 580.

<sup>13</sup> “*Gauḍapāda Kārikā*” in *The Upaniṣads: a New Translation*, Swāmī (2008a).

<sup>14</sup> An echo of *Muṇḍaka Up. II. ii. 11*: “That immortal Brahman alone is before, that Brahman is behind, that Brahman is to the right and left. Brahman alone pervades everything above and below; this universe is that Supreme Brahman alone.” “*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*” in *The Upaniṣads: a New Translation*, Swāmī (2008b).

<sup>15</sup> “*yatra nānyat paśyati nānyac chṛṇoti nānyad vijānāti sa bhūmā; atha yatr’ anyat paśyati anyac chṛṇoti anyad vijānāti tad alpam; yo vai bhūmā tad amṛtam, atha yad alpam tan martyam; sa, bhagavaḥ, kasmin pratīṣṭhita iti; sve mahimni, yadi vā nairātmavāda mahimnīti.*” *Chā. Up. VII. xxiv. 1.*

<sup>16</sup> *Kaṭha. Up. II. li. 11, Bṛh. Up. II. iv. 14, Muṇḍaka Up. II. ii, Chāndogya Up. VI. Xiv., etc.*

<sup>17</sup> *VC*: 251, 385, 390, and 391.

<sup>18</sup> *VC*: 252, 266, 351, 362, 377, and 387.

produces it. In *VC*, the seeker is completely dissatisfied by the material universe as he says "...save me, fallen as I am into this sea of birth and death, with a straightforward glance of thy eye...",<sup>19</sup> and "save me from death, afflicted as I am by the unquenchable fire of this world forest and shaken violently by the winds of an untoward lot."<sup>20</sup> Propelled by the realization that the objective universe is dissatisfying the text, *VC* teaches that non-dual *Brahman* is not just a conceptual doctrine but rather the plenary experience which the individual aspirant must strive to attain in order to be enlightened. The text *VC* strives to bridge the gap between the dichotomy of reality and illusory character of the world by making use of appropriate language that instills in the reader the attitudes of devotion, obedience, respect, and all that *śruti* instructs as a primary means of accessing and understanding the conceptual framework of Advaitic metaphysics.

There is no cognition in the world without the language, as all knowledge is as if intertwined with the word.<sup>21</sup> Language is thus a medium through which all knowledge passes through, and the language is useful in relating to the empirical world and yet at the same time, in suggesting the highest metaphysical conceptualizations.<sup>22</sup> A learned scholar opines that the metaphysician is always an "ideal language" philosopher, who strives to create a language that is capable of expressing an "extra-linguistic independent entity" where there is a latent identity between language and what is it about.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the objects perceived in the material universe create a metaphysical dissatisfaction in the seeker, in *VC*, the language and the semantics therein is employed to bridge the gap between the seeker and concepts in such a way, that by adhering to the attitudes of devotion, obedience, and respect to *śruti* and *guru*, the seeker confirms to the conceptual framework of Advaita as taught in *śruti*. In *VC*, in comparison to other texts, a special focus is at place, where language itself leads to the metaphysical/conceptual structure of Advaita, due to the convincing discourse of the *guru*, which makes the reader to replace himself in the place of the seeker. In this way, all the exhortations given by the *guru* to *śiṣya* can be adjudged to the reader.

The symbiosis between language and concepts in *VC* is significant to tread its non-dual path. The function of language in conveying its message to the reader is extremely interesting, and worthy of attention, because the use of appropriate language along with various attitudes, namely, devotion, obedience, and respect, increases the understanding and conviction of the reader to accept what *śruti* instructs. The exhortations to the disciple in the text are intended for every reader.<sup>24</sup> The repeated re-reading of this text creates an awareness of non-duality within, bringing about a positive attitude in the life of the seeker and prompting the seeker to respond to the text positively. Hence, the linguistic style of *VC* is in symbiotic relation with its content in such a way that both the text and concepts synchronistically make the reader understand its content. Firstly, by

<sup>19</sup> *mām uddhar' ātmīya-kaṭāksa-dṛṣṭyā rjvyāti-kāruṇya-sudhābhivṛṣṭyā. VC: 35b.*

<sup>20</sup> *Durvāra-saṁsāra-davāgni-taptaṁ doḥhūyamānaṁ duradrṣṭa-vātaiḥ; bhītaṁ prapannaṁ paripādhi mṛtyoḥ śaraṇyam anyad yad ahaṁ na jāne. VC: 36.*

<sup>21</sup> *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari with the vṛtti, Iyer (1965).*

<sup>22</sup> John Grimes, *Perspectives on Religious Discourse*, 22, 52.

<sup>23</sup> A.K Chatterjee, "Metaphysics, Subjectivity and Myth" in *The Indian Philosophy Congress*, Hyderabad, Osmania University, 1971, 31–32, as quoted in Sebastian (2006).

<sup>24</sup> *Śṛṅṣv'āvahito vīdvan yan mayā samudīryate; tad-etaḍ-śravanādi sadyo bhava-bandhād vimokṣyase. VC: 68.*

means of intellectual analysis of inner self, the dichotomies involved in the body and individual self (*jīva*) are exposed. Secondly, the fundamental philosophical questions that surfaced after the analysis of inner self are answered by means of *śruti* text, analogy, and illustrations. This serves as an appropriate technique of the author of *VC* in trapping the attention of the reader for further clarifications. The doctrine of *Advaita* is unfolded in a more assertive way in the entire work, thereby creating in the mind of reader the necessity of attaining the self-realisation via “*jñāna*.” Accordingly, in the most creative way by means of quenching the intellectual curiosity of the seeker, this text dramatically traps the reader to appreciate the truth hidden in this text, inviting him to undertake *sādhanā-catvāri* and the path and process of ultimate realization, namely, *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. Hence, from what appeared to many as an accumulation of meaningless jargons, the language in *VC* transposes *śruti* into a meaningful means of communication of the highest import that is immediately evident and immanently present to one’s own inner-dwelling self. Although the text fails to explicate the reality fully, “it fails in so rich, engaging, and persuasive way that we alter our way of living and realize Brahman in a radical revision of our own identities.”<sup>25</sup> If the text *VC* were to merely inform the reader that *Brahman* is devoid of qualities, then it would be conveying nothing effective. But the peculiarity of this text is that it compels the reader to move back and forth by means of a dialogical procedure that is so rich, it makes the reader investigate subtle nuances of the text, and prepares the attentive reader to appropriate the truth of *Brahman*. Therefore, one concludes that the language in *VC* does not represent the reality, but due to its symbiotic relation with the concepts, language brings the reader to a point where he himself is made to understand concepts and transcend himself from the language and concepts to an incommunicable insight.<sup>26</sup>

## II

The initial part of the text concerns itself in explaining intelligibly the dissatisfaction experienced in the empirical world through the proofs from *śruti* texts. In order to explain this predicament, the text introduces a number of contexts, all of which are centered upon the concept of *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is the most significant philosophical concept in *VC*, which sets the beginning of its metaphysics. The doctrine of *avidyā* intimately connected with the theory of superimposition, and accordingly, the text argues that the universe with its multiplicity is superimposed upon *Brahman* by the *vikṣepaśakti* (projecting power) and the *āvaraṇaśakti* (veiling power) of *avidyā*.<sup>27</sup> *Avidyā* is characterized neither by existence nor by non-existence (*sadasat*), and therefore, it does not have an independent ontological status (*VC*: 109). *Avidyā* is the temporary reality in the plane of relative existence, as if the state of affairs of the world, and therefore known *anirvarcanīya* (indefinable) and *mithyā*. According to Śāṅkara, *avidyā* is a term that is fundamentally a description of a state of being, an existential fact in everyone’s existence, and the ignorance that is present from the beginning of human

<sup>25</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedānta*, 78 (1993).

<sup>26</sup> Kanti Lal Das, “Editorial Note” in *Language and Reality*, Das and Basak (2006).

<sup>27</sup> The projecting power (*vikṣepaśakti*) which is of the nature of activity, projects power of *rajas*, where by one gets entangled with lust, anger, avarice, arrogance, spite, egoism envy, jealousy, and the like. This entraps man into repeated cycle of birth and death (*VC*: 111–113).

birth. *Avidyā* is only the limitation of *Brahman* for nothing can exist by negating *Brahman*. *Brahman* itself is the *locus* of all negations. In the state of *avidyā*, *Brahman* as one without a second is not fully realized. Thus, “*avidyā* is not an ontological entity but a philosophical concept and therefore a practical state of affairs.” In his *Brahmasūtra-Bhāṣya*, Śaṅkara employs the concept of *avidyā* to explain the mutual transposing of self and non-self and the unacceptable combination of truth and falsity.<sup>28</sup> *Avidyā* is an *advaitic* tool employed to explain the multiplicity of appearances.

In *VC*, the concept of *avidyā* is employed in two ways. On the one hand, *avidyā* is the cause of rebirth, *saṃsāra*, and the evil that exists within the world. It is the apparent transformation of *Brahman*. On the other, *avidyā* is the linguistic device by which it explains the appearance of non-dual reality as multitudinous.<sup>29</sup> The primary proof on the illusory character of *avidyā* of *VC* is discovered in *śruti* and ratified by one’s own experience. Thus, *avidyā* in *VC* establishes a nexus between material universe and *Brahman*. This is proved in *śruti* when it says that “all creatures spring out of *Brahman*.”<sup>30</sup> *Īśvara* is *Brahman* conditioned by adjuncts of empirical names and forms due to *avidyā*. He is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the world.<sup>31</sup> He is the moral governor who controls and rewards in accordance with their *karmas*.<sup>32</sup> He is the protector of all creatures.<sup>33</sup> “The self is *Brahma*, the self is *Viṣṇu*, the self is *Indra*, the self is *Śiva*; the self is all this universe. Nothing exists except the self.”<sup>34</sup> In this way, the concept of *avidyā* is meaningfully employed in *śruti* and manifests the manifoldness of *Brahman* to the people of ordinary intelligence. However, for the seekers after truth, who have reached the state of *yogārūḍha*,<sup>35</sup> *VC* avers that the supreme self is different from the *prakṛti* and its modifications. It is of the essence of pure knowledge and absolute (*VC*: 135). This realization makes the seeker eligible to sublimate all the concepts of *avidyā*, as they are merely a mask and are paradoxical to the reality per se. In *VC*, this exercise is carried out by various analyses that point out the illusory character of the concepts introduced in the *śruti*.

The text *VC* picks up proofs from *śruti* to claim that *avidyā* creates metaphysical dissatisfaction and verifies it through the personal experience of each seeker. According to *VC*, the material universe is under the spell of *avidyā* and all the concepts belong to it. This has been validated by the teaching of *śruti*. According to *VC*, the scope of *śruti* is limited for it is merely a testimony that assists the revelation of *Brahman*. *Śruti* (scripture) teaches *sṛṣṭi* (creation) of the world, but *śruti* does not declare that it is real. *Śruti* also teaches non-duality of the self and the illusory nature of plurality. If *sṛṣṭi* were real, these later teachings of *śruti* would themselves be fallacious. And the entire purpose of the *upanīśads* would have been defeated. *VC* compliments this view when it says that “the study of the scriptures is useless so long as the highest truth is unknown and it is

<sup>28</sup> *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya...*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> John Grimes, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya Bhagavatpāda*, 33; Cf. also Stephen Kaplan, “*Vidyā* and *Avidyā*: Simultaneous and Coterminal?..”, 178.

<sup>30</sup> *ChU*. III.15

<sup>31</sup> *BSB*. I.1.5, 20–21; I.2.8–9, 11 and 13; I.2.1; IV.1.3.

<sup>32</sup> *SB*, *ChU*. IV.14: 2–3.

<sup>33</sup> *BṛU*. IV.4.22; *BSB* I. i. 20.

<sup>34</sup> *VC*: 388.

<sup>35</sup> The state of *yogārūḍha* is described in *Gītā*, VI. 4 “When one is attached neither to sense objects nor to actions, and has given up all desires, then he is said to be *yogārūḍha*.”

equally useless when the highest truth has already been known.”<sup>36</sup> The real purpose of the instances where *śruti* speaks of *sṛṣṭi* is to introduce the unity of the phenomenal manifestation which indicates its real nature as non-dual reality (Cole 2004). The whole creation (*sṛṣṭi*) is transient, impure, flimsy, and comparable to foam, a mirage, or a dream, and the *VC* supports this view by rope/snake illusion, silver/nacre illusion, and by *pañcakoṣa viveka*. Accordingly, the concept of *jāti* (birth) or *sṛṣṭi* introduced by the *upaniṣads* is spoken from the standpoint of Sāṅkhya system that introduced the duality of the reality. *AV* claims that the purpose of introducing the concept of duality in *śruti* is not to say that it is real but point out its illusory character and supplement duality with successive concepts that lead to non-duality. Acknowledging the popular belief of Sāṅkhya and other schools, the *upaniṣads* offer justifications for such misunderstanding and destroy such wrong beliefs through consequent proofs from the scriptures. Accordingly, the last verse of *VC* indicates that *sṛṣṭi* in *śruti* is spoken of for those who are afraid of the truth of *ajāti* (non-birth). They are those who have not yet progressed on the spiritual path to the point of such an understanding. The fact is that the world looks as if it were created or apparent transformation of *Brahman* due to the *upādhis*. The *upaniṣads* do not intend to completely upset the generally prevailing understanding of ordinary people but intend to impart the highest teachings gradually by applying various metaphysical concepts, which also have their value as a means to realization. They all exist temporarily in the world of experience. The ultimate truth is that nothing is born or created, and all the multiplicity is merely a transformation of *Brahman*. *Sṛṣṭi* does not independently exist, and not true in itself, just like the shadow of a tree can exist only in relation to the sunlight, while the tree can exist without its shadow. Nonetheless, the ignorant who misconstrues the shadow to be having its origin in the tree is deceived by the presence of a third factor, namely, the light. Similarly, the ignorance goes all the way to characterize as if *Brahman* creates this world. *Brahman* is all existent and that reality is unborn (*aja*), immutable, non-transformable, and non-dual (*advaita*). The central doctrine that strikes at the root of dualistic conceptual thought is *Ajātivāda*,<sup>37</sup> which means that “nothing whatsoever is born.”<sup>38</sup> This paradoxical doctrine intends to show that from the standpoint of the absolute (*Brahman*), there is no duality, nothing finite, or non-eternal. All else, other than *Brahman* is illusory and apparent transformation. Therefore, unborn *Brahman* cannot be construed through gross form which is the constituent of earth, water, and fire. *Brahman* is immutable and unmoved, free from all relative attributes, beyond hunger, devoid of grossness, birthless, undecaying, immortal, undying, beyond fear, homogeneous nature like a lump of salt, self effulgent, the one only without a second, without antecedent or consequent, and without interior and exterior (*BrU* IV.iv.22). *Brahman* is devoid of any worldly qualities, and all the expressions or attributes are metaphorical. He cannot be limited to any worldly attributes, and they cannot reveal him completely. Therefore, negating him from the worldly attributes would bring about clarity in understanding the notion of ultimate

<sup>36</sup> *avijñāte pare tattve śāstr’ādhitū tu niṣphalā; vijñāte’api pare tattve śāstr’ādhitū tu niṣphalā. VC: 59.*

<sup>37</sup> The main argument for the non-origination (all is *aja*) and that origination of anything cannot be demonstrated as follows: the non-existent cannot have the non-existent for its cause nor the existent have the non-existent for its cause. The existent cannot be the effect of the existent nor can the existent be the effect of the non-existent. See, Colin A. Cole, *Asparśa-Yoga...*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Colin A. Cole, *Asparśa-Yoga...*, 39.

reality. The unborn *Brahman* can be designated only in negative terms, namely, *nirupādhi* (unconditioned), *nirviśeṣa* (indeterminate), *nirguṇa* (attributeless), and *nirākāra* (formless).

Despite its illusory character, *VC* explains the significance of the external world. “The external world is an object of experience through the senses and cannot therefore be altogether non-existent like the horns of a hare.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, it is necessary for *śruti* and *guru* to presuppose the temporary (not permanent) validity of attributes that characterize *Brahman* and sublimate them consequently.<sup>40</sup> For example, the purpose of presupposing that *Brahman* as the cause of entire creation is to say that he is not the effect of any other cause. In saying that he is the primary cause, it exists beyond the ordinary cause of the universe, and thereby, it is clarified that *Brahman* is neither an effect nor a cause. If *śruti* attributes to *Ātman* the qualities like *to be known*, it should be understood that *Ātman* is the *only reality to be attained* and worth knowing, the reason being all other realities apparently real. In a similar way if *śruti* mentions of *Ātman* as the *knower*, it is to clarify that *Ātman* is not an object to be known. Moreover, with an attribute of *knower*, he is considered to be the witness or the *sākṣi* who views disinterestedly. Ultimately, *śruti* cancels even the witnesshood of *Ātman*, because it entails certain individuality. In this way, each and every concept introduced in *śruti* become paradoxical to the ultimate reality and *VC* sublimate all the linguistic constructions on reality.

### III

It is important to note that in the text *VC*, language and concepts, along with (dialectical) reasoning, play a considerable role in the process non-dual path. The reality is one without a second (*advaita*),<sup>41</sup> and language plays a role to explain away the real nature of things through the concepts of *māyā*, *ajñāna*, *jīva*, *jagat*, etc., to arrive at the reality per se. It has been already established in previous sections that the intuitive knowledge arrived through the employment of logical analysis and the reasoning that augments the rational analysis that *Brahman* is immutable (*kūṭastha nityam*), unborn (*ajāti*), and beyond the grasp of reason. The doctrine of *ajātivāda* somehow clarifies the confusion triggered by the concept of duality, although it says nothing about *Brahman*. It has only negated what *Brahman* is not, meaning *Brahman* is not born or transformed into this world. This has destroyed the misunderstanding and prevented from misinterpretation about the knowledge of the ultimate. However, the problem persists. Śāṅkara, while saying that non-origination is the highest truth, maintains that the concept of non-birth can be conceived only at the existence of apparent birth and its attributes. The notion of non-birth carries its meaning only against the conception of birth or apparent transformation. Construed this way, we cannot designate the notions of birth and non-birth to the highest reality. For instance, the existence of *guru*, *śruti*, and *śiṣya* is limited to the world of experience, which is

<sup>39</sup> *Brahmasūtras According to Śāṅkara*, Swami Vireswarananda (tr.), *BSB* II. 2. 28, p. 197.

<sup>40</sup> *VC*: 230–232.

<sup>41</sup> *nirguṇaṁ niṣkalaṁ sūkṣmaṁ nirvikalpaṁ nirañjanam; ekam ev'advayaṁ brahma ne'ha nān'āsti kiñcana. VC*: 468; also see, *VC*: 464–470.



based upon false knowledge. These ideas have no validity from the standpoint of the non-dual *Ātman*. It has been already stated that the *guru*, *śruti*, and *śiṣya* have meaning only in the state of ignorance. Their purpose is to help the unilluminated realize the truth. Similarly, *Ātman* is called born (*ja*) birthless (*aja*) from the standpoint of false knowledge based upon imagination. In reality, it is not even birthless and such term cannot be employed to designate its being. In order to refute Sāṅkhya and the other schools of thought, the non-birth of *Ātman* is asserted by the scriptures from the standpoint of false knowledge. This birthlessness is true only in relation to empirical birth, as *jāti* and *ajāti* are correlative and empirical terms.

Even to say that the *Brahman* is *ajāti* (unborn) is just an illusion. For *ajāti* (non-birth, non-origination) is meaningful only as long as *jāti* (origination, birth) carries a meaning within everyday empirical moorings. Just as *Turīya* is called the fourth through the superimposition of a number category for the purpose of indicating the subtle difference from the three *avasthās*, so also is *ajāti* spoken of erroneously to this degree in order to enable the student to understand the subtle distinctions of this reality from what appears to be born. In addition to that, even to designate this non-dual principle as “*Turīya*”<sup>42</sup> or *Brahman* is in fact as dangerous as to distort the truth of it itself. That is why in the later stage, false knowledge of duality and birth is negated by the knowledge of non-duality and birthlessness. In this process, the concepts designated by the negative terms are self-refuting, as birthlessness can be conceived only if we know what the act of “birth” means. Thus, we reach an impasse of *advaitic* metaphysics about which nothing can be said validly. What this exercise should offer is only some vague knowledge of an indescribable experience or an insight into its nature.<sup>43</sup> Since *Brahman* is excluded from the categories of *jāti* and *ajāti*, the conceptual framework raises our thoughts to higher level, to the realm of trans-empirical. It is on the basis of this transcendental awareness that one is able to negate attributes and non-attributes. While negating all the duality and attributes, it does give us a glimpse of nature of reality without attributes, although we fail to understand what it is. At this level, there is no language but meta-language and no concepts but meta-concept.<sup>44</sup> While having denied all that is dual, there exists nothing apart from the transcendental reality that one’s consciousness can reach. “There is nothing beyond ‘this’ entity that is experienced as ‘I’ but the real I is that which witnesses the ego and the rest. It exists always even in the state of profound sleep. The *Śruti* itself says, ‘It is birthless, eternal, etc.’ Therefore, *Paramātman* is different from the gross and subtle bodies.”<sup>45</sup> In the absence of any duality, the consciousness cannot reach other than itself. The only option left to reach this reality is the direct experience of the entity that carries on this

<sup>42</sup> *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* XII.

<sup>43</sup> It is not the void of the nihilists, because this void cannot be conceived without consciousness. A chemical is used to remove impurities from water; after destroying the impurities, the purifying agent also disappears, leaving only pure water. The whole spiritual discipline consists in negating one imaginary image by another, and its process continues till the last trace of imagination is eliminated, leaving behind the self-luminous reality.

<sup>44</sup> Here, the term meta-language and meta-concept should be understood in Aristotelian sense. It points out to something after or beyond language. However, these terms do not deny language at this phase. These terms point out to a distinct sensibility at this phase which goes beyond the realm of speakability. The distinct type of non-dual existence communicates itself by one’s own manner of existence to the aspiring self.

<sup>45</sup> “*Ahaṁ padārthas-tv’aham-ādi-sākṣi nityaṁ suṣuptāvapi bhāvadārśanāt; brūte hy’ajo nitya iti śrutiḥ svayaṁ tat pratyagātmā sad-asad-vilakṣaṇah.*” VC: 294.

reflection. “This *Ātman* is a self-cognized entity because it is cognized by itself. Hence, the individual soul is itself and directly the supreme *Brahman* and nothing else.” “*asau svasākṣikam bhāvo yataḥ svenānubhūyate; ataḥ param svayam sākṣāt pratyag-atmā nairātmyavāda c’etara.*” (*VC*: 216). Therefore, it can be established that *Brahman* is the same self-existing reality, the I. This identification of reality is possible only by dialectical reasoning, for language and concepts are not to be identified with it.

Although language is a vehicle of communication that carries its message faithfully and delivers to the addressee, language has a limited scope in explicating the reality.<sup>46</sup> Language is merely a bridge between the seeker and reality<sup>47</sup> that is transcendent to thought, non-relative, non-discriminative, non-differentiated, non-discursive, and non-dual.<sup>48</sup> Language assists the seeker to identify it with what it conveys and the matrix of dialectics carries the concepts to the higher level, thereby destroying all the lower concepts that were otherwise a hindrance for the realization. So, language due to its inability to create any impression on the question of non-duality gives way to a form of meta-language that transcends all dichotomies of words and deeds and functions as a precursor for the ultimate realization by means of adhering to *cittaśuddhi*. There is no differentiation between language and doctrines at this stage for attributes used to *Brahman* such as *nirguṇa*, *nirākāra*, and *nirviśeṣa*; although they appear to be dual as far as they can be construed only through their linguistic counterparts such as *guṇa*, *ākāra*, and *viśeṣa*. In reality, they imply none of these. *Brahman* is beyond any categorization. Thus, with regard to language in *VC*, one can confidently imitate Ganeswar Misra who says that “by language, we achieve kicking out of language.”<sup>49</sup> Referring to the self in this stage, *VC* says that “the knower of all changes in things subject to change should necessarily be eternal and changeless.”<sup>50</sup> The key formulations of this indescribable insight into the nature of *Brahman* would be that *Brahman* is not born nor is anything else born (*VC*: 134). It is neither born nor unborn but existent. *Brahman*, which is the eternal and immutable reality, is neither effect nor cause. There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, and none striving or aspiring for liberation, no seeker after release, and no one who is liberated.<sup>51</sup> *Brahman* cannot be designated nor described, for it is trans-phenomenal.<sup>52</sup> *Brahman* is designated indirectly by means of taking a paradoxical position on all the concepts that are designated in the material world. The *Brahman* is beyond all the concepts of *jāti* and *ajāti*, indicating in the words “*neti-neti*” or “what it is not” (*VC*: 210, 255, 481, 492, 493, and 495).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> C. D. Sebastian, “Language and Mind: A Mādhyamika Perspective” in *Language and Mind: The Classical Indian perspective*, Vol. 2, K. S. Prasad (ed.), 46 (2008).

<sup>47</sup> John Grimes, *Perspectives on Religious Discourse*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcāiraprapañcitam nirvikalpamanānārthametattatvasya lakṣaṇam. MāK* 18:9 in *Nāgārjuna: A translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, Inada (1993).

<sup>49</sup> Misra, Ganeśwar, *Language Reality and Analysis: Essays on Indian Philosophy*, Mohanty (1990).

<sup>50</sup> “*vikāriṇām sarva-vikāra-vettā nitya’avikāro bhavitum samarhati; manoratha-svapna-susuṭṭiṣṭu sphuṭam punaḥ punaḥ dṛṣṭam asattvam etayoḥ.*” *VC*: 295.

<sup>51</sup> Colin A. Cole, *Asparśa-Yoga...*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> “*buddhir vinaṣṭā galitā pravṛtṭiḥ brahm’ātmanor ekatay’ādhigatyā; idaṃ nairātmyavāda jāne’apy’anidam nairātmyavāda jāne kiṃ vā kiyad vā sukham asty’apāram.*” *VC*: 481.

<sup>53</sup> In spite of the nature of these restrictions of description, positively, *Brahman* is eternal and infinite non-dual reality. It is the self-luminous light, pure consciousness, infinite bliss, and tranquility. This description is in essence of the definition of *Brahman* as *Sat*, *Cit*, and *Ānanda*.

## IV

### Critical Appraisal

The explorations emphasizing the necessity of three distinct phases in Advaitic non-dual path in the above sections have many far reaching implications. They are listed below:

Firstly, in general, the language of metaphysical speculations as well as their practical realization are far removed from the primary task of philosophy. The philosophy is primarily concerned with the analysis of a text or the subject matter and is not concerned about how it can affect oneself in this process. However, in Indian philosophy, one cannot ignore the practical dimension, and moreover, being a practitioner of what one upholds definitely aids in articulating the deep insights embedded in Indian philosophy.

Secondly, the doctrine of infallibility of *śruti* does not indicate that *śruti* in itself is the self-sufficient means of non-dual realization. The limitation of *śruti* to reveal should be compensated with proper rational analysis of the content of *śruti*. Rationality stands here as a defense against the blind orthodoxy than enforce an opinion about *śruti* such as being merely an indicator of the true knowledge yet to be attained as long as it is respectfully accepted in order to understand what it articulates. No doubt *śruti* reveals what the sages have realized through their experiences. Yet, as per the appropriation or the realization of same experience to oneself is concerned, one requires to transcend *śruti* by further stages than merely to accept what the sages have articulated in *śruti*, as language fails to articulate the non-dual experience completely.

Thirdly, the sublation of the lower reality does not mean that its existence is completely rejected. In this regard, *BS* II.2.28 says that “non-existence [of external objects] is not true, because they are experienced.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, sublation does not completely annihilate the world but removes it as an hindrance as it were for the perception of the ultimate reality. The notion of non-existence in Advaita is used in a different sense than popular understanding, for Advaita that emphasizes on permanence as a necessary characteristics of the “real” or “existent” renders the world non-existent as it is impermanent in relation to the real. Certain readings on Advaita reveal that some scholars of Indian philosophy have appropriated the term non-existence with the popular understanding.

Fourthly, only rationality allows to climb the dialectical ladder, and therefore, for an advaitin, realization unaided by rational justification is a myth. The involvement of human intellect, together with all the intellectual capabilities, can bring a transformative effect within oneself than attempting to cause such an effect by external means of idol worship. The only devotion that *VC* emphasizes is “*svasvarūpānusandhānam*” or “seeking after one’s real nature” (*VC*: 31).

Fifthly, language, concepts, and dialectical reasoning are the essential steps for Advaitic realization. They all help to arrive at the phase of meta-language and meta-concept, which entails a different sort of expression and conceptualization of reality, that is accessible only to the one who has obtained an insight into the nature of reality through successive processes, yet trailing through duality. The doctrine of Jivanmukti

<sup>54</sup> *nābhāvaḥ upalabdheḥ. BS. II. 2. 28.*

points out to the possibility of such a sublime existence that transcends the boundaries of language, concepts, and reasoning, though unspeakable through linguistic formulations, yet been identified through meta-language and meta-concept, paving the way for the realization.

Sixthly, the meta-language and the meta-concept entail a state of existence which is devoid of the dichotomy between the linguistic articulations and their practice that indicates *cittaśuddhi* as the necessary means for the highest realization.

Seventhly, the Advaitic realization is nothing but the realization of one's personhood to its perfection. The Advaitic realization is not other worldly enterprise but the realization of the self in the present world in its non-dualistic perspective. However, this realization is not psychological. It is not merely a mental change but a complete change that changes every facet of experience in a radical way which cannot be adequately explained by psychology.

To sum up, the three phases of symbiosis, paradoxical dilemma, and dialectics are essential steps of non-dual realization. While all of these steps are limited in one or the other way, these steps indicate and lead the seeker to march forward in his metaphysical enterprise. Thus, in the text *VC*, although at first there appears to be a clear distinction between philosophical speculations such as its metaphysics, and its practice, nonetheless, if we understand the method of this text, the words of *śruti* stretch beyond the conventional boundaries of words, or theoretical discourse, not only to encompass contemplation but also knowledge of non-duality and realization of it. The principles and rules of philosophy as well as experience are interwoven in such a way that they are theoretical and practical aspects of one and the same attempt at realizing the highest end. The interpretation and the rational justification of the experience is supplied by the theoretical doctrines that confirm the concrete experiences. Thus, it is the task of philosophy to translate and understand in terms of thought what has been presented in experience. Rationality without practical import renders itself useless. Similarly, practice and rituals performed without proper meaning and guidance are just a form of idol worship. Philosophy and experience taken in isolation fail to produce the appropriate result. Reason justifies the experiences, and frames the experience in a particular philosophical system, although reason itself cannot contain experience. Theory solves the philosophical problems regarding the ultimate reality, whereas practice substantiates theoretical claims and establishes their authenticity.

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