

श्रीगुरुभ्यो नमः

Understanding the 'Rope-Snake' through the Madhva System

In His Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashya Shankaracharya has made a trendsetting statement:

सर्ववादिनामपि अपरिहार्यः परमार्थ-संब्यवहारकृतो व्यवहारः ।

//sarva-vAdinaamapi aparihaaryah paramaarthasamvyavahaarakRto
vyavahaarah// (Brihadaranyaka bhashya: 3.v.i).

//in fact, all schools must admit the existence or non-existence of the phenomenal world according as it is viewed from the relative or the absolute standpoint.// (translation by Swami Madhavananda, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad with the commentary of Sri Shankaracharya, published by advaita ashrama, kolkata.)

This statement, made on the authority of the Shruti, sets the standard for the formulation of any system of philosophy. After all, the aim of philosophy is to show a way out of the present state of bondage to a state of liberation. The system should be able to describe the present state of bondage in understandable terms and set forth the path to liberation too in equally comprehensible terms. In Advaita, the terms used to signify the two states are: **vyavahaarika** and **pAramArthika**. The former is the transactional state of duality which is the cause of samsara. The latter is the absolute state of non-duality which is the nature of liberation. The Mandukya Upanishad, in its crucial 7th mantra, while defining the Turiya, the Absolute, Brahman, Atman, makes two significant observations: **अव्यवहार्यं (avyavahAryam) अद्वैतम् (Advaitam)**. The former precludes all duality-caused transactions, vyavahara, in the Absolute, Turiya. This negation shows that the state of samsara is only vyavahaarika. That this is negated shows that it, the vyavahaarika is not real; only superimposed due to ignorance of the Turiya. The other word 'Advaitam' denotes the non-dual, vyavahaara-free nature of the

Turiya. The presence of another crucial word there प्रपञ्चोपशमम् (prapanchopashamam) crowns this state as one completely free of the world of duality.

The state of bondage has been likened to an illusory snake superimposed on a rope. This example is in tune with the purport of the above Mantra where the vyaavaharika world (samsara) is a mistaken view of the avyavahArya Turiya.

That the schools that followed Advaita have not been an exception to the rule Shankaracharya stated (as mentioned at the beginning), is evidenced by the acceptance by the Madhva school of these **two states**, only with a different nomenclature: **paratantra and swatantra**.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy says:

// Madhva (1238-1317 CE)

According to Madhva there are two orders of reality: 1. svatantra, independent reality, which consists of Brahman alone and 2. paratantra, dependent reality, which consists of jivas (souls) and jada (lifeless objects). Although dependent reality would not exist apart from brahman's will, this very dependence creates a fundamental distinction between brahman and all else, implying a dualist view. //

That the two pairs Paramarthika-vyavaharika and Swatantra-paratantra are only synonymous has been elucidated in an article:

<http://atma.sulekha.com/blog/post/2008/09/a-vichara-on-swatantra-and-paratantra-independent.htm>

In the sequel, it is proposed to present how the Madhva system's pair of Swatantra-paratantra aids the easy comprehending of the rope-snake analogy to describe the state of samsara (and the state of release therefrom).

The following quote from an article on the Madhva system is taken up for a close examination:

<http://www.indiadinivine.org/articles/218/1/Philosophy-of-Dvaita-Vedanta/Page1.html>

// Though existence is thus 'reality', Madhva recognizes that its highest expression must be metaphysical independence of every other form of existence in finite reality, in respect of its being, powers and activity. Everything in finite reality is therefore grounded in the Independent Reality, known as Brahman and needs it for its being and becoming.

While existence in space and time is thus reality and is possessed by the world of matter and souls, there must be something more than mere existence, having metaphysical independence or substantiality in its own right which may be designated as the highest real or the philosophical Absolute which would be the ultimate expression of all else. Such independent reality should be immanent in the universe, whence the latter could derive and draw its sustenance. Without presupposing such a basic and transcendental reality that would have to be immanent in the world, there would be chaos and disorder in the universe.

However, Madhva's chief ontological classification of 'being' is into principles viz. 'svatantra' (Independent Reality) and 'paratantra' (Dependent Reality). The term 'Reality' represents three primary data: the thinking self, a world of external realities and indications of an Infinite Power rising above them.

In Madhva's conclusions of Dvaita metaphysics reached by the evidence of 'pratyaksa' 'anumana' and 'sabda pramana' this infinite power is that Supreme and Independent Principle which does not depend on any other for its own nature and existence, self-awareness or for becoming an object of knowledge to the thinking selves for the free and unfettered exercise of its own powers. This 'svatantra-tattva' (independent principle) is called God or 'Brahman' or 'Isvara'. Though Brahman can do very well without pra krti or purusa (Dependent Realities), it prefers, in its infinite glory and inexorable will, 'to do

with them'. Such dependence (apeksa) of Brahman on things which are in themselves dependent on It, is no mark of inferiority or limitation.

The dependence of the world of matter and the souls on Brahman is in the sense that both are functioning at His will, which is the *essential condition and sustaining principle* that invests them with their reality and without which they would be but void names and bare possibilities. //

The very first paragraph of the above quote gives us the idea that **two levels of reality are accepted by Madhva**. The independently real, Swatantra, is undoubtedly superior to the dependently real, paratantra. The entire structure that Madhva has laid out as described in the above quoted portions, can be best understood with the aid of the rope-snake analogy:

When a snake is seen in the place of a rope, only the snake is seen as real. But is it independently real? No; its very existence (being and becoming) is dependent on the underlying, unseen rope. However, the rope in itself is not dependent on anything else, relatively, for its being. Thus, the rope is independently real. Since this state of error is sought to be overcome, the right effort would be directed at knowing the substratum, rope. When this is accomplished, what one will have is the independent rope alone; the 'dependently real' snake having sublated. The knowledge of the rope is the positive gain of the correcting exercise; the sublating of the snake being only the fallout. Conversely, the sublating of the illusory snake does not end up in 'no positive fruit at all'; the causal rope-knowledge is the undeniable positive gain.

Thus, while the rope-snake analogy is a useful tool to the clear grasping of the two-level reality proposed by Madhva, the understanding of the rope-snake analogy itself is easily possible by a consideration of the Madhva system's Swatantra-paratantra pair. It is easy to appreciate the perfect one-to-one correspondence between the two pairs: Paramarthika-vyavaharika and Swatantra-paratantra of Advaita and Dvaita respectively.

That the ultimate and absolute non-dual nature of Brahman, the Swatantra-paramarthika, also is identical in the two systems is brought out by this 'statement', also from the above quoted portion of the Madhva system:

//Though Brahman can do very well without prakrti or purusa (Dependent Realities), it prefers, in its infinite glory and inexorable will, 'to do with them'. Such dependence (apeksa) of Brahman on things which are in themselves dependent on It, is no mark of inferiority or limitation.

The dependence of the world of matter and the souls on Brahman is in the sense that both are functioning at His will, which is the essential condition and sustaining principle that invests them with their reality and without which they would be but void names and bare possibilities. //

This '**statement**' very clearly translates into: 'Brahma satyam jagan mithyA, jlvo Brahmaiva na aparAH' (Brahman alone is Real and the world is unreal. The jiva, soul, is none other than Brahman) and implies 'Atmasambandhl kimapi nAsti' (There is nothing other than Atman).

An Advaitin would see the above 'statement' as largely depicting the essence of the Advaita Brahman. In Advaita, Brahman is One Only without a second in its absolute nature, Paramarthika. By the association of Maya, prakriti, the world is created. Yet, since this creation is only maayika, Brahman remains asanga always. The very accepting of the possibility of **Brahman doing very well without prakriti or purusha (jiva)** implies Its eternally asanga and essentially Advaita svabhAva. Again, accepting this possibility of Brahman being a 'Great Stand-Alone' results in the natural conclusion of a situation where the prakriti and jiva are not there. And Its 'preference' to 'do with them' is not difficult to explain as it is due to Brahman's icchA. Brahman's icchA and mAyA are one and the same. Advaita views the 'dependents on It' ([paratantra](#)) as what is/are superimposed on It and hence the substratum Brahman is not limited by the superimposed prakriti and the samsara born of it. Such a Brahman/Atman is not related to anything, in reality, is borne out by the above 'statement.' Again, the purport of the

words '*.... is no mark of inferiority or limitation*' of the above 'statement' is expressed by Sri Shankaracharya in the preamble to His Bhashya on the Brahmasutras thus:

//tatraivam sati yatra yadadyAsaH, tatkRtena doSheNa guNena vaa aNumAtreNApi sa na sambadhyate...// [*'This being so, the locus (Atman/Brahman) is not affected in any way either by the merits or demerits of the things superimposed.'*]

Thus, even though the language used to give expression to the '**Brahman/jagat/jiva triad**' is different in the two schools, essentially they mean the same. Recognizing and accepting this would lead to harmony; the opposite is only acrimony. (*This is one area where scholars could focus upon so as to work out a harmony.*)

The following words, of the Article on the Madhva system, in particular bring out, in unambiguous terms, the illusory nature of the dependent reality constituting the created world and the bound jiva-s.

//The dependence of the world of matter and the souls on Brahman is in the sense that both are functioning at His will, which is the essential condition and sustaining principle that invests them with their reality and without which they would be but void names and bare possibilities.//

Why would Brahman **will** the creation of a world and place in it the souls in bondage? Is there any justification for causing a painful samsara for the jiva-s? That samsara is undoubtedly painful is repeatedly instructed by Scripture; so this is not anyone's allegation. Normally replies like 'It is His will, It is His Leela, etc' are proffered but this only raises further questions instead of silencing the questioner. No doubt such replies are intended to enable the aspirant to proceed in the path of sadhana by developing the attitude of 'submitting' to the Divine Will, yet when further probed, the usage of words like 'will' only culminate in the concept of Maya. Ishwara's IcchA, will, is nothing but **Vishnu Maya**. There are Gita verses to substantiate that the Lord creates and manages this samsara through His Maya. That the Lord wants us to 'transcend' His Maya rather than to succumb to it or submit to it is one unmistakable indication that the

paratantra/vyavaharika reality is indeed illusory, just like the superimposed snake on the rope.

Since it is stated in the above quote that Brahman's Will is the essential condition for the sustenance of samsara, the logical conclusion would be: Samsara is contingent on Brahman's Will/Maya. Therefore when Brahman ceases to 'will' any longer the continuance of samsara, there is an end to samsara. So the remedy to end samsara is to see that Brahman stops 'willing' the continuance of samsara. Thus, the 'onus' of samsara is on Brahman, or to put it more clearly, on His will or Maya. Thus, samsara is maayika, being a creation of Maya.

Would it not be logical, therefore, to 'separate' Brahman from Maya? This would ensure that there is no longer samsara. We have seen earlier that samsara (world and jiva) is 'dependent' on the 'will' of Brahman. So, when Brahman's Maya/Will is 'separated' from Brahman, samsara, having no support, will collapse/vanish/cease to be. That this is a clear possibility is what has been assured in the quoted lines above:

//Though Brahman can do very well without prakrti or purusa (Dependent Realities),...//

The aim of all sadhana is ideally to realize Brahman as free-of-will and free of being a support for prakriti and jiva. This is what the word प्रपञ्चोपशमम् (prapanchopashamam) of the Mandukyopanishat conveys. Knowing Brahman thus is what is called Mukti, freedom from bondage.

The Correct World-view

Whose world-view is the correct one, the ignorant man's or the wise man's ? Obviously, the wise-man's view alone has to be the correct view of the world. And what is the wise man's, in other words, the liberated man's view? This is answered by the Madhva system thus:

www.dwaita.org (under the question: Why does Tattvavada deny Jivanmukti?)

/// Because a mukta, or liberated person, should not even be physically present in the material universe, unlike the un-liberated. A person who is living in the world cannot be said to be free of sorrow born of material contact, and also cannot be said to experience the joy of his own nature at all times. The very act of living in a gross material body entails things such as eating, sleeping, pleasure and pain, etc., which cannot be accepted in a mukta. //

The above statement about the mukta makes it clear that he is no longer in 'prapancha' where alone the five bheda-s persist. All the worlds, 'above and below' the human world attainable owing to one's karma, too, come under the class of 'prapancha'. For, it is only in the wake of the five differences any samsaric experience possible.

Thus, the wise mean does not see the world/samsara; he 'sees' Brahman in the place of the world/samsara. He/there is no longer a samsari; there is only Brahman that is free of Its 'will' to support the samsara and samsari. For the wise man everything is Brahman – VaasudevaH Sarvam. For, 'Brahman can very well do without prakriti and purusha' as per the Madhva system we saw above.

A sloka composed by Sri Vyasa Tirtha, which is considered to be a gem explains Sri Madhwa's Philosophy in a nutshell:

http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&rlz=1B3GPCK_enIN334IN334&q=Navratna+of+Dvaita+Vedanta&aq=f&oq=&aqi=

// श्रीमन्मध्वमते हरिः परतरः सत्यं जगत्

तत्त्वतो भिन्ना जीवजना हरेरनुचरा नीचोच्चभावंगताः ।

मुक्तिर्नैजसुखानुभूतिः अमला भक्तिश्च तत्साधनं

ह्यक्षादित्रितयं प्रमाणं अखिलाम्नायैकवेद्यो हरिः ॥

SreeManMadhwamate Hari: Paratara: Satyam Jagat thatvato

BhinnaaH jeevajanaa: Hareranucharaa Neechotcha Bhaavam gathaa: |

Mukthir Naija Sukhanu Bhutir amala Bhakthishcha Thath Saadhanam

Hyakshaadi Thrithayam pramaanam Akhila AAmnayaika Vedyo Hari: ||

Nine Tenets are propounded in this sloka and the meaning, in parts, of this sloka is -

Hari is the most supreme of all.....

This world (Jagat) which is made out five differences, is eternal and not a false.

Attaining the Nija-swaroopa (True-Nature) is called as Mukti.

Faultless Bhakthi (Devotion) is the means to attain Mukti.//

From the above, we come to understand that Hari is Supreme. He is independent and we are regulated and controlled by him. If we understand this and have unflinching faith on God as well as Guru Bhakthi, we can easily cross over the Ocean of Samsara..//

The verse says that the world is real as per Dvaita. It means that it is only dependently real as we have already seen. That it is eternal and not false is also true from the bound jivas' standpoint.

Thus, the fate of paratantra/vyavaharika 'reality' is now settled once and for all. What remains is the Swatantra/Paramarthika Reality, Brahman.

To come back to where we started this discussion, the superimposed snake is none other than our paratantra/vyavaharika reality, being just dependent on the underlying rope, the swatantra/paramarthika reality.

While Advaita explicitly calls the vyavaharika a seeming reality, Dvaita stops short of saying this by just saying that it is paratantra reality. Both terms culminate in holding the dependent reality a mithya, unreal, entity. For the goal of both Advaita and Dvaita is definitely not to retain samsara but to show the means to realize Brahman as free from Vishnu Maya. That this is the ultimate goal is unambiguously declared in the statement 'Brahman can very well do without prakriti and purusha'.

The means to liberation:

According to Dvaita the supreme means to liberation is blemishless Devotion **amalaa Bhakthishcha Thath Saadhanam**.

Shankara, commenting on the Bhagavadgita verse 13.18 says:

//Who is fit to attain this right knowledge? He who is devoted to Me, who regards Me, Vasudeva, the Supreme Lord, the Omniscient, the Supreme Guru, as the Self, the Soul, the Essence, of everything, i.e., he who is possessed, as it were, with the idea that all that he sees or hears or touches is nothing but the Lord, Vasudeva. Thus **devoted to Me, and having attained the right knowledge described above, he is fit to attain to My**

state, i.e. he attains Moksha.//

In the VivekachUDAmāni (32) Shankara says:

मोक्षकारसामग्र्यां भक्तिरेव गरीयसी [Among the requisite means for liberation, Bhakti is the foremost]

Sri Purandara Dasa sings: Daasanaagu VisheShanaagu...

<http://www.kannadaaudio.com/Songs/Devotional/home/Daasanaagu.php>

'Become devoted to Hari, do not remain attached to the world...'

Shankara taught:

Bhaja Govindam bhaja Govindam Govindam bhaja mUDhamate

samprApte sannihite kAle nahi nahi rakShati Dukring karaNe

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4FUQxn4CnY>

'Be devoted to Govinda...when death comes to take you away, worldly pursuits will not save you.'

A Synopsys:

- The above study has taken the shape of the structure of the Brahmasutras. The four themes/chapters/divisions corresponding to the Sutra Book are :
- Samanvaya: The ultimate purport of the two systems Dvaita and Advaita is the same: The Realization of the Supreme Brahman, untouched by prakriti/maya.

- Avirodha: The two schools are non-contradicting when closely examined, keeping the ultimate purport in mind.
- Sadhana: Supreme Devotion is the means for Realization of Brahman.
- Phala: The fruit of sadhana is Mukti, Moksha consisting of experiencing one's innate Bliss is taught by both the schools.
- The world and jiva have only dependent/vyavaharik reality as per both the schools.
- Brahman is the sole Independently Real Truth as per both the systems.
- Brahman is unconnected to the world and jiva in absolute terms as per both the schools.
- The Mukta, the liberated soul, does not experience the material world as per both the schools.

श्रीसद्गुरुचरणारविन्दार्पणमस्तु