

# The Status and Role of Scripture in Advaita

*- A study in reply to a Dvaita objection.*

**In the system of Advaita Vedanta, the Only Absolute Reality is Brahman. The world and the jiva are only appearances on the Substratum Brahman. Those who are not thoroughly familiar with the system of Advaita often raise an objection: What is the status of the Veda, Shruti (Scripture)? If Scripture is not admitted to be the Absolute Brahman and regarded as belonging to the relative world, how can such a seemingly real scripture give the releasing knowledge?**

**Such questions are taken up in the present article for a reply. In order to make the study a focused one, a real-time objection, from the Dvaita (Madhwa) school, is considered for analysis.**

The following objection has been extracted from a BlogSpot:

<http://rashmun.sulekha.com/blog/post/2007/09/dvaita-vs-advaita-vadiraja-attacks-advaita.htm>

// The notion of vyavaharika satya, or truth from the purely provisional or empirical level of practical life as distinguished from the ultimate truth or parmārthika satya was first given by the Mahayana Buddhists and then subsequently surreptitiously incorporated into their philosophy by the Advaitins.

In the present post, I will just mention some of the things the Dvaitin Vadiraja says about this theory. [All quotes from the book "Vadiraja's refutation of Shankara's non-dualism"(trans. Prof. L. Stafford Betty, with an introduction by Dr B.N.K. Sharma). The commentary, of Stafford Betty, is largely based on the commentary of Vadiraja's traditional commentator Visvendratirtha, according to Stafford Betty.]

But first a few words about Vadiraja. Sharma calls him the most facile writer in Dvaita literature. His fine poetic faculty and human touch, the quick flashes of his wit and humour, his apt analogies from life and literature, and his racy way of putting things have made him the most popular and enthusiastically applauded writer in Dvaita literature according to Sharma.

And Stafford Betty says:

**I personally find that most of Vadiraja's arguments are potentially as disconcerting to the sophisticated Non-dualist philosopher of our own day as they probably were to Vadiraja's original auditors....Anyone interested in putting Non-Dualism to the twin philosophical tests of internal consistency and reality-consistency could hardly do better than acquaint Himself with Vadiraja's merciless dialectic. His methodology is of the most modern and potentially devastating sort: it is what Western philosophers call the reductio ad absurdum, and what Indian philosophers picturesquely describe as "slaying one's enemy with his own sword"...one thing must be granted, I think, by all: Advaita has met a most formidable opponent.**

In what follows, words in square brackets are mine.

But now, on to what Vadiraja says:

On Vyavaharika satya:

**[Comments Vadiraja:]Moreover, why don't you openly acknowledge that this nebulous term ("vyavaharika") renders Scripture untrue and unrevelatory?...Why don't you ever come out and say within an assembly, "All these words about the Lord and about religious duty are untrue and unrevelatory! If you are afraid to say that it is obvious that Scripture is unauthoritative, then the fault would be compounded because the censure of scripture is veiled; in that way, you fool, there is additional deception of good people...**

And when the same vyavaharika doctrine opposing both (identity and difference) texts alike, sets aside their validity, then how can you abandon the many difference texts in favour of a few identity texts? Your texts would deserve to be invalidated because not conforming to the rule imposed by your own vyavaharika doctrine, which nullified all texts. If not, why is a Buddhist, valuing the few scriptural statements favourable to him, ignoring all the rest of Scripture opposed to him—why is he not right while you, sir, are? Hence, this filthy demoness of a sophistry (the vyavaharika doctrine) is not to be brought into an assembly of the wise.

And again:

[Comments Vadiraja:] One who is afflicted with a mania producing conviction in an inextinguishable "Great Illusion", who moreover declares, while posturing as one grounded on the Scriptures, a belief in the world's depravity based on the depraved condition of the all assisting Scriptures kills his own mother! I believe he gets amusement by bringing harm to everyone.

Comment on above [by Stafford Betty]: *He says that a Non-dualist is like a man who kills his own mother: while he claims an enormous debt to the scriptures, as a man to his mother, he at the same time nullifies their worth by saying they are vyavaharika—a classic instance of "biting the hand that feeds you." He also says that the Non-dualist is sadistically crazed. He is like one who gets pleasure from showing all that they are but phantoms acting out their parts on an unreal stage. He undermines their confidence that what they do has any real significance. In short, he is the enemy of the people. For these reasons, and for all the others listed above, the vyavaharika doctrine is fallacious, and the doctrine of difference carries the argument.*

[Vadiraja is in fact making a very valid point. In his commentary to the Vedanta sutra, Adi Shankar damns all sources of valid knowledge; this includes the damnation of perception and inference but, strangely enough, also of scriptural knowledge since from the point of view of the ultimate truth (paramarthika satya) even the Veda is false; this of course makes Shankar's assertions self-contradictory-Rashmun]

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## **The Advaitin's short response to the above objection:**

An illustration: in a dream, I am imprisoned for an offence on a charge that is bailable in law. I seek bail and a rich relative of mine offers to bail me out and I am released from prison. The dream ends there.

Upon waking, am I still imprisoned? No. Am I concerned about seeking bail? No. do I seek my rich relative's help? No. do I finally get the bail? No. Am I released from prison? No.

Similar is the situation of the soul, atman, in Vedanta. As taught by Bhagavatpada Shankara, the atman is ever free and never was in bondage. The bondage that is experienced, according to Sri Shankara, is due to ignorance, avidya. While under the spell of ignorance, like myself under the spell of sleep/dream in the above illustration, the bound person seeks to get Himself released from samsara and seeks the help of scripture. He obtains this knowledge by the intervention of a compassionate Guru and gets released from bondage. Upon realization of his true nature, he knows that he was never under bondage, ever free. The notion of having been bound is only a phantom idea entertained under the spell of ignorance.

Now, comparing with the observation made in the above illustration, the notion of having been bound is only a phantom idea entertained under the spell of ignorance (akin to the dream-imprisonment). The jeeva sought the help of the scripture (akin to the rich relative of the dream) and gets released (akin to the release from the prison due to the bail). Thus, in Sri Shankara's system, the scripture is valid only in the realm of ignorance, just as the rich relative and the bail of the dream. Upon becoming freed from ignorance, is there any need or relevance of the scripture? No. Upon waking up from the dream, is there any need for seeking bail? Is/was there imprisonment at all? No. Upon waking I realize that I was never imprisoned at all;

upon atman-knowledge the 'jeeva' realizes that there was no bondage ever. It is in this sense that Adi Shankara said that the scripture is valid only in the state of vyavahaara. This is because in the paramarthic state there is no bondage/samsara and no seeking to get released and therefore no scripture. Upon waking, if I ask my rich relative whether he had bailed me out last night, he would only laugh at my foolishness. Similar is the situation to hold that the scripture is valid in the state of paramartha. This is the context of Adi Shankara's denial of scripture in the state of absolute reality.

Does Adi Shankara invalidate the Veda? He has made it amply clear, in no uncertain terms, without being ambiguous, **that all religious duties, adhering to the scriptural teaching, etc., is fully valid prior to a person getting the knowledge of the Supreme. His Brahmasutra and Bhagavad-Gita commentaries contain such statements in several places.**

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad iv.iii.22, Sage Yajnavalkya teaches the state of deep sleep, in response to the question of Janaka to expound the state of liberation. The state of deep sleep all differences, all things that bind a being to the world, stand subdued. The jeeva is free from all bondage, as it were, in that state. This state is taught as an illustration to the state of liberation. Herein it is said:

//In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, worlds no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble Brahmana, no killer, a chandala no chandala... a monk no monk, a hermit no hermit. This form of the jeeva is untouched by good work and untouched by evil work, for he is then beyond all the woes of his heart.//

Shankaracharya comments:

// .....Worlds, which are either won or to be won through rites, are no worlds, owing to his dissociation from those rites, Similarly the gods, who are a part of the rites, are no

gods, because he transcends his relation to those rites. The Vedas too, consisting of the braahmanas (a section of the Vedic text), which describe the means, the goal and their relation, as well as the mantras, and forming part of the rites, since they deal with them, whether already read or yet to be read, are connected with a man through those rites, Since he, the jeeva, transcends those rites, the Vedas too are then no Vedas.//

This very Upanishad (iv.iv.13) teaches the **mode** of realization of the truth thus:

**atmanam** ched vijaniyat **ayam asmi** iti pUrushah |

kim icchan kasya kamaya shariram anu sanjwaret ||

[If a man realizes the Self, Atman, as 'I am this', then desiring what and for whose sake will he suffer in the wake of the body?]

**AS** taught herein, when a person realizes his true nature as Brahman, the, PoorNa, the Full, he is not in want of anything, this or other-worldly. The Vedas are there as a means to secure for man the four objectives of life: dharma, artha, kaama and moksha, Since this man has already attained the highest goal, liberation, moksha, his dependence on the Veda ceases. This is what is meant by Shankaracharya when He says that the Veda has for its realm the state of ignorance, vyavaharika. When the paramarthika is realized, where is the need for the Veda? Thus, in that state, 'the Veda is no Veda' as the Veda itself declares. If this is seen in the right perspective, one would not come up with the baseless charge that 'the advaitin has turned ungrateful to the very Veda that took him to the plane of liberation.'

**An illustration would make this clear:** All the schools that regard the Veda as the basis for their systems agree that the householder has scripturally ordained duties like agnihotra as a daily ritual. Supposing a man practicing agnihotra as per the dictates of the karma-ritualistic-portion of the Veda takes up sannyasa, monkhood.

He at once becomes ineligible to practice agnihotra. The portion of the Veda enjoining him to perform agnihotra as a daily ritual is no longer valid for him. For this reason could it be said that he has become ungrateful to that portion of the Veda? The case of a person attaining liberation and thereby transcending the realm of the Vedic authority is similar.

### **Gratitude** *par excellence*:

The tradition of knowers of the truth bears out for itself their sublime attitude towards the Veda and the Guru who have been instrumental in securing the Knowledge to them. We have in the Panchadashi, (chapter vii – 297) a seminal work on Advaita Vedanta, authored by a foremost Acharya, Swami Vidyanaraya, a sample of the unmatched gratitude expressed by a Knower:

aho x]]s^]m]ho x]]s^]m]ho g[[ru]ho g[[ru: |

aho \$]]n]m]ho \$]]n]m]ho s[[k]m]ho s[[k]m]/ || 7.297 ||

[The knower exclaims in joy and gratitude: Ah! the Scripture, Ah! the Scripture! Ah! the Guru, Ah! the Guru! Ah! the Knowledge, Ah! the Knowledge, Ah! the Bliss, Ah! the Bliss!!]

Let us have a look at the bhakti of Bhagavan Himself. There is this famous statement of Sri Ramachandra in the Yogavasishtha (6.128.102 to 105)

na vidher-na nishedhasya tvatprasaadaadayam prabhuh |

tathaapi tava vaakyam tu karaniyam hi sarvadaa ||

Vedaagama-puraaneshu smrtishvapi mahaamune |

Guruvaakyam vidhih prokto nishedhas-tad-viparyayah ||

By thy grace, this individual (called Ramachandra) **is no longer bound by injunctions and prohibitions.** Yet, thy word is ever to be obeyed. O great sage! Everywhere – in the Vedas, aagamas, puraanas and smritis – it has been prescribed that **the word of the Guru is the injunction and what is contrary to it is the prohibition.**

Having submitted thus, Sri Rama, not being able to see any other way of repaying the debt of benefaction of the attainment of the supreme goal conferred on him by his Guru, **offered Himself to his Guru** by way of placing the Guru's sacred feet on his own head; and instructed, in order to steady the faith, all the people assembled, about **the unrivalled supremacy of the glory of knowledge and the glory of the Guru, directly experienced by Himself.**

ityuktvaa charanau tasya vasishthasya mahaatmanah |

shirasaa dhaarya sarvaatmaa sarvaan praaha ghRnaanidhih ||

sarve shrnvata bhardram vo nischayena sunischitam |

aatmajnaanaat param naasti gurorapi cha tadvidah ||

Being Himself the spring of mercy and the self of all, Sri Rama proclaimed : 'Listen all of you, our firm conviction that is undoubtedly auspicious to you all – there is nothing higher than the Knowledge of the Self; nor anything higher than the Guru, the Knower of the Self.'

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Sage Raikva, a knower of the Supreme self, is approached by king Jaanashruti in an episode in the Chandogya Upanishad. This sage Raikva, beyond the realm of the Vedic injunctions and prohibitions, teaches the ultimate truth to the king. Naturally, this teaching which is contained in the Upanishads themselves, is enough proof to the fact that a knower does not 'discard' the Veda in the sense of denigrating it. On

the contrary he holds the Veda in the highest esteem and bases his teaching of the truth, to those who approach him, on the Veda.

In the srimad Bhaagavata purana we have the case of a knower by name Jada bharata. In this case too, he is seen to be beyond the realm of the Vedic injunctions and prohibitions. Yet, when the Sauveera king Rahuugana approaches him for the highest knowledge, the sage bestows it in the manner of the Upanishads themselves.

Shankaracharya' s are the oldest extant commentaries for the ten principal Upanishads, the Brahmasutras and the Bhagavadgita. It is based on these commentaries that the later Acharya's formulated their systems, although not in agreement with him. He established matha-s in various parts of the country for the propagation of the vedic wisdom. If, as the objector contends, Shankara had 'killed his mother, the Veda', all these activities of his would be unaccountable.

These are proofs to show that the charge that a Jnani deprecates the Veda is sheer ignorance.

[ A book titled 'Mata-traya-sameekshaa' (kannada) authored by Dr. Anandatirtha VyshampAyanAcharya Nagasampige, a noted Madhwa Scholar, contains a section on 'the common features of the three schools, advaita, vishishtadvaita and dvaita.' Herein is mentioned first and foremost: all the three Acharyas have held the scripture (Veda) to be the basic foundation for the structures that they have raised. ]

Thus, to say that Adi Shankara has damned scripture is born out of:

1. An incorrect study of the scripture.
2. An incorrect understanding of the scripture.
3. An incorrect study of Adi Shankara's commentaries.
4. An incorrect understanding of his system.

In fact in several places Adi Shankara has stressed that 'the Upanishads are the only means for us to gain the knowledge of the supreme'. He pays the richest possible tributes to the scripture, coming from the depths of his heart in sentences like these: 'the Veda, greater than even a thousand mothers, exhorts us to.....', 'the Veda, compassionate than even a thousand fathers and mothers...' etc.

If only we are able to see the difference in the standpoints (of bondage, vyavaharic and liberation, paramarthic reality), there would be no confusion and the inappropriate charge that Adi Shankara is a 'killer of his mother'.

**illustration 2:** A pole-vaulter uses the pole to vault Himself to a height. Upon reaching the height, he drops the pole and gently lands. If he were to think, upon reaching the height: 'Oh! Is it not the pole that has vaulted me to this height? Would it not be 'ingratitude' to the pole if I were to drop it?', he would not land at all; he would only fall awkwardly.

The case of the scripture is similar to the pole in the above illustration. It helps the aspirant to know the truth and be free. Just as the pole is no longer part of the vaulter's post-landing state, the scripture is no longer a part of the post-realization reality. The scripture pertains to the pre-realization era of ignorance. It serves its purpose and gets sublated along with the world. There is no question of ingratitude. The scripture is a part of the world created by God. It is meant to give the aspirant realization and that is all. A man uses a boat to cross a river. Once he has alighted on the other bank, he leaves the boat and proceeds on his way; he does not carry the boat with him.

**illustration 3:** In the growth and ripening of a banana, its skin plays a vital role. Yet when it comes to eating the ripe banana, one would not think 'After all this skin has protected and nurtured the banana. To discard it would be ingratitude, So it would be best to eat the fruit along with the skin.' It would only be sensible to remove the skin and eat the fruit. Similar is the case with the Veda. After it has given its fruit of self-

realization to the aspirant, it ceases to be a means any longer for self-knowledge to that aspirant. He might very well use the Veda to teach others.

**illustration 4:** When a building is coming up, scaffoldings are erected. Only with the help of these it is possible to complete the building. When it comes to occupying the building one will have to remove the scaffoldings and make room for people to live there. It would be foolish to say: 'After all, the scaffoldings have supported the ceiling during the curing period and so to remove them would be gross ingratitude to them.'

**illustration 5:** A boy spends a decade in a school. When the time comes to leave the school he would not think: 'This school has helped me acquire knowledge and grow in manners and skills. I must never leave the school'. Once the purpose of the school is done, one will have to leave it and proceed further. One cannot permanently remain in the school however noble it might be.

We have seen several illustrations, both scriptural and worldly, to show how a means will have to be left after the end has been reached and how it is no ingratitude to do so; it is only natural that such a course takes place.

**The** scripture is neither untrue nor unrevelatory to the Advaitin. It is very much true in its own realm and certainly revelatory; only on the basis of the scripture does an aspirant come to know of the truth and get liberated. It is like the sense organs. The eye is the only valid organ in determining the forms and colors of objects. It is useless in knowing sound or smell, So too, the Veda is the sole authority in gaining the knowledge of the self. It ceases to be so once the knowledge has been gained. It is like the eye that has performed its function of securing the knowledge of, say, a flower. One need not use the eye to know the colour of the same flower again. While in the case of the eye it is useful in knowing the colour and form of another flower, the case of the Veda in the matter of the Self is not so; there is no another Self to know. Once the knowledge of the Self is had, the Veda as the means ceases to be so for that aspirant.

**The** state of liberation according to Adi Shankara is the Secondless One Pure Consciousness that does not have any divisions. In such a state it is meaningless to talk of differences like scripture and the reader of scripture. It is in this context that one has to understand the non-availability of scripture in the paramarthic state. It is not a lacuna; it is rather a case of transcending the scripture after making use of it for the purpose it is meant for. The various illustrations above make this point amply clear.

// In his commentary to the Vedanta sutra, Adi Shankar damns all sources of valid knowledge; this includes the damnation of perception and inference but, strangely enough, also of scriptural knowledge since from the point of view of the ultimate truth (paramarthika satya) even the Veda is false; this of course makes Shankar's assertions self-contradictory-  
Rashmun//

**This** comment is partly responded to in the foregoing. As to the 'damning' by Adi Shankara of all sources of valid knowledge including perception....here is a short response:

In the kathopanishad (ii.1.1) there is a passage:

//The lord damned the senses to be outgoing as a result of which the man sees only the objective world and does not cognize the inner Self. Some rare, daring person withdraws the senses with great effort and succeeds in getting the 'vision' of the Self.  
//

**So,** we see that it is not Adi Shankara who has damned the sense perception to the vyavaharika (realm of ignorance) but the Upanishad itself teaches that the creator lord has 'damned' the sense organs to be outward turned. From this it is clear that the area of operation of the senses is the outside world and not the Atman. That the senses are to be completely restrained and subdued in order to get the 'vision' of the Self is also taught by this Upanishad in the passage 2.3.10:

//When the five senses along with the mind are stilled and the intellect also does not function, such a state is called the supreme state. This the knowers consider to be the state of yoga. //

This state is stated by the Upanishad to be the ideal condition for knowing the Atma.

**The** conclusion of this short study is: The sense organs are valid only in the realm of ignorance where 'one sees something other than Himself'. But the transcendental state of knowledge is one where 'one does not see anything other than the Self'. This is the declaration of the Chandogya Upanishad in the context of 'bhuma vidya'. This is context of Adi Shankara's words in his preamble to the commentary to the Brahma sutras.

**A different approach to the above objection (of vyavaharika/paramarthika):**

The difference between vyavaharika and paramarthika is inevitable for a philosopher. When someone has to speak of a system that has for its end the attainment of moksha, evidently, a difference between the state in bondage and the state of moksha has to be maintained. If this is not done, there will be no way one could tell the state of moksha from that of the bound state. The difference between the two states is most relevant for the aspirant: he has to know how he is now, in the state of ignorance, and how he will be in the state of moksha, upon gaining knowledge.

**The objection:**

//The notion of vyavaharika satya, or truth from the purely provisional or empirical level of practical life as distinguished from the ultimate truth or paramarthika satya was first given by the mahayana budhists and then subsequently surreptitiously incorporated into their philosophy by the advaitins.//

**Is thus answered in the sequel:**

**The three states/types of reality (sattaa-traividhyam) are spoken of in the upanishad:**

While commenting on the mantra "**satyam cha anrtam cha satyam abhavat'** (Taittiriya **Up. 2.6**) the Acharya says: satyam = **vyavaharavishayam** since this is being mentioned in the context of 'srishti' of the world. He adds: this is not **paramarthasatyam** (absolute reality) since Brahman alone indeed is paramartha satyam. This vyavaharavishayam satyam is only aapekshikam, relative. He explains: when compared to the water in a mirage, the water (that we actually use for drinking, etc.) is real. This is what is meant by 'vyavaharika satyam'. That which is not thus real is anrtam, unreal. [The overall meaning of the Shruti passage is: The Satyam, Brahman, manifested Itself as the satyam (the world of objects) and anRtam (the illusory objects of experiences of illusion)]

The above bhashyam brings to the fore that **three types of 'reality' are admitted in the shruti**. Commonly these are known as: 1.Paramarthika satyam which is Brahman alone, 2. Vyavaharika satyam which constitutes the common world experience of samsara and 3. Pratibhasika satyam which is a seeming reality, actually within the samsaeric experience. This seeming reality of say, the mirage-water or rope-snake, is corrected in the vyavahara itself and does not require Brahma jnanam for this. The vyvahaarika satyam, of course, gets corrected upon the rise of Brahma jnanam. The shruti vakyams for this are: ekameva adviteeyam (Chandogya Up.), neha naanaa asti kinchana (kathopanishad), sarvam khalu idam brahma (Chandogya Up.), etc.

What is worthy of noting in the above bhashyam is the **shruti pramaanam for the existence of the three types of reality**. The Taittiriya shruti we took up above is the pramanam for the three types of reality. It is not the concoction of the advaitins/Bhagavatpada/later acharyas. Nor is the concept 'surreptitiously

incorporated into their philosophy by the Advaitins' as it is made out. The bhashyam uses the two specific names and the third is only implied.

**Here** is a comparative chart that takes into account the Upanishad, the Gita, the Advaita method and the Dvaita method.

### **A sample of the vyavaharika-paramarthika divide in the Upanishads:**

1. In the Mandukya Upanishad we have the delineation of the first three pada-s, the waking, dream and sleep, both in the individual and cosmic levels. This is the vyavahara state, of bondage. The seventh mantra (nantah prajnam, na bahih prajnam...) teaches the paramartha state, the turiya, where the first three pada-s are negated and the turiya is held out to be free from them. In this mantra the word 'prapanchopashamam' teaches that the world is not there in the Turiya. The word 'Advaitam' teaches that the Turiya is Non-dual, free of any second entity of any kind.
2. In the Taittiriya Upanishad the five koshas, the five sheaths namely, the body, the prana, the mind, etc. are enumerated. This is the vyavaharika. One has to transcend these five sheaths in order to gain the vision of the Atman that is 'located' beyond the five sheaths, in the innermost recess of one's heart. This is the paramarthika.
3. In the Mundakopanishat the method of gaining dispassion is stated. The aspirant critically examines the world, here and hereafter, and concludes that the uncreated, the natural, is not attainable by unnatural, artificial means. Here, in just one passage by using the words 'akRta' and 'kRta' the Upanishad teaches the paramarthika and the vyavaharika.

4. In the Kathopanishad passage 'anyatra dharmat...' in just one go the Upanishad teaches the paramarthika by the word 'anyatra' and the vyavaharika through the words 'dharma, adharma, kRta, akRta and bhuta, bhavya'.

5. In the Chandogya Upanishad 'bhuma vidya' section the use of the word 'alpam' is the vyavaharika and the word 'bhuma' is the paramarthika.

6. In the Mundakopanishad again, in the passage depicting the two bird imagery (dvaasuparna) the vyavaharika is taught and the subsequent passages teach the paramarthika.

One can go on with such instances that are abundant in the Upanishads.

In the Bhagavadgita, a sample is: in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, the vyavahara state is spoken of as: 'mat-sthani sarva Bhutani': 'All these beings are inhering in Me.' The paramartha state is that where no beings inhere in the Lord: 'na cha mat-sthani bhutani.' 'These beings do not inhere in Me'. Another sample from the Gita: 2.16 : // na asato vidyate bhaavao, na abhaavo vidyate satah//. The first portion of the quoted verse says that the vyavaharic reality, asat, that is experienced, does not have a true existence. The paramarthic reality, sat, alone really exists; it can never go out of existence. How do we know that the lord is talking about these two levels of reality here? The context of this verse is: the Lord is instructing Arjuna on the nature of the Atman, human life, death, destruction, misery, etc. All these questions were raised, in his lamentation, by Arjuna. The Lord takes up these questions and shows Arjuna that since all these experiences are in the realm of ignorance, they do not have any absolute reality, asat. Knowing thus, Arjuna has to go ahead with his duty in the dharma yuddha (righteous war). Studying the context of the verse will confirm that the Lord does not mean anything else than these two levels of reality, vyavahara and paramartha, while giving out this teaching of asat and sat.

**Advaita** distinguishes between the vyavahara and paramartha states and teaches that the vyavahara (jagat, jiva) state stands negated in the paramartha (Brahma satyam) state and the aspirant who does the sadhana in the vyavahara state realizes that the paramartha state does not have in it any aspect of the vyavahara.

In the Dvaita system, although these two terms are not used, they speak of two levels of satya: svatantra satya and paratantra satya. Ref. an article on Dvaita Vedanta:

<http://www.indiadinivine.org/hinduism/articles/218/1/philosophy-of-dvaita->

**The first is the 'independent reality' and the second is 'dependent reality'.** The highest, absolute principle is Hari (Harih para-tarah) and is independently real. The world (satyam jagat), is dependent on Hari and only dependently real. Now a question arises: is it held by this system that Hari and jagat enjoy equal status of reality? Obviously the reply is 'no'. The very categorization as independent and dependent realities shows that the **two are not real on the same footing**. We can consider an example to understand this phenomenon. There is a rope and a person superimposes a snake in that locus and thinks there is a snake there. Now the rope, the actual thing there, enjoys an independent reality. The illusory snake, as long as it is believed to exist, enjoys a dependent reality; its reality is dependent upon the independently real rope. This is because only in the place of the rope a person imagines a snake. The distinction between the two realities has been brought out by a song of the famous composer-saint Sri Purandaradasa in a song: 'allide nammane, illiruvudu summane.' This means: my (paramarthik, true) abode is 'there'; what is here is only a non-entity, a fake, insubstantial, the vyavaharika. He goes on to caricature the worldly-home/body and hearth in words such as: kalla mane, sullu mane, etc. The difference between the paramartha and

vyavahara is finely, subtly and very effectively brought out in this song. The message conveyed is: All that you see here now is not (going to be) there in the 'yonder'. That means, for the aspirant, there are two levels of reality: the one that he sees and experiences here, now, in the state of ignorance which is full of misery and the other: the absolute, independent, free of the dependent, that he will realize to be his true state. (mukti is naija sukhanubhutih; the liberated state is the experiencing of one's innate blissful nature). Surely, when he attains liberation (only after death, according to Dvaita), the world and its experiences will cease to be; they will not continue 'there'. So, to think that the 'satyam jagat' is absolute is wrong; it is only vyavaharika satyam, relative. To whom is the jagat satyam? to the aspirant, after liberation, the world is not going to be an object of experience. To those in ignorance, the world will continue, birth after birth. It would be incorrect to hold the ignorant person's view of the world as absolute.

Further, the Taittiriya Upanishad says: satyam (jnanam, anantam) Brahma. This it does with a view to differentiate Brahman from what is already known to us: the world. If the world is also satyam absolutely, this teaching of the Upanishad would be devoid of meaning.

In conclusion, it could be stated that the Chandogya upanishadic VI chapter teaching: 'mrittiketyeva satyam' (the effect, pot, etc. are real only as the causal clay. Apart from the material cause clay, the effect pot etc. are mere names, and are not real.) This is the meaning of the terms 'svatantra satta' 'independently real' (cause, clay) and the paratantra satta, 'dependently real', effect, pot etc.

Thus, the distinction between two levels of reality is inevitable and inescapable in the teaching of the transcendental truth. That is what we saw above in the Upanishads, the Gita, the Advaita and Dvaita schools. If the Buddhist school too talks of two levels of reality, what is wrong in it? After all they too can't escape **this inevitability**. Quite aptly does Sri Shankaracharya say:

//sarva-vAdinaamapi aparahaaryah paramaatha-samvyavahaarakRto 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, Kolkota.)

[Replies to some other comments that followed the above reply can be viewed in the 'comments' section appearing on this page:]

<http://rashmun.sulekha.com/blog/post/2007/09/dvaita-vs-advaita-vadiraja-attacks-advaita.htm>

**A Note on Reader's response:** The topics dealt with in the article are all self-explanatory. In case a reader has a genuine question, with a view to really know about any concept covered in the article, the author may be contacted with the specific query, in brief. Only those questions that deserve a reply will be answered. Questions framed for the sake of arguing/debating/mere curiosity, etc. will be ignored.

Om Tat Sat