

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



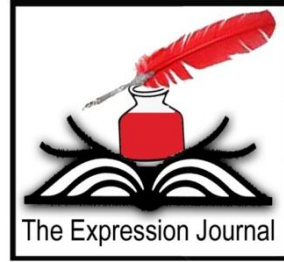
Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 9 Issue 2 April 2023

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



ASPARSHYOGA OF GAUDAPADA AND NOTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN ADVAITVA VEDANTA

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Abstract

Gaudapada, Shankara's great guru, according to tradition became deep in meditation at Badarik ashrama, experiencing the teachings of Vedantic wisdom. Gaudapadiya-karika (GK) is a verse exposition (commentary) on Mandukya Upanishad (MU). It is also called as Agamashastra. Gaudapada chooses Mandukya Upanishad as his primary text to expound the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The Upanishads, the Bhagavat-gita, and the Brahma-sutra are the triple canon consists the 'Prasthanatraya'. These are the source of wisdom and it is known as 'Shruti', because it is apaurusheya. Later Vedantic literatures have been developed on these texts. A systematic development can be seen in the works of Gaudapada. Gaudapada's philosophy is not only based on the Prasthanatraya but also has the influence of Buddhist ideas which was flourished before him as not a Buddhist teacher but influenced by the Buddhist ideology and arguments. The major tenets of the philosophy of Gaudapada are the non-origination or ajati and Asparsha-yoga. Aparshayoga is the yoga of transcendence. Through this one realizes the supra-rational reality. Aparshayoga is a new invention of Gaudapada. It is devoid of sparsha. It is a meditation technique and where he narrates the three avasthas, theory of sadhana is practiced in the transcendental level. The mind has no touch or sparsha with any external object. It reaches in an absolute state of experience, which is equal to Asamprajnata-samadhi. It is the moksha in the Vedantic sense. It is the absolute realization of non-duality. When writing the detailed exposition of the Mandukyopanishad through his Gaudapadiya-karika, he aimed the reaffirmation of the Upanishadic wisdom. Gaudapada quotes many passages from the Brihदारanyaka Upanishad. The paper aims re-evaluate this concept.

Keywords

Aparushya, Agamsastra, Non-Origination, Asparshyoga, Samadhi, Brahman, Asparshyoga
Gaudapada, Notion of Consciousness, Absolute reality, Non-dualism, Advaita Vedanta.



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The Upanisads, the Brahma-Sutra and the Gita are called 'Prasthanatraya' or the three basic works of Vedanta on which almost every great Acharya has commented. The Upanisads are regarded as the Shruti by the Vedantins and their teachings were summarized by Badarayana in his Brahma-Sutra and were developed into the school of Advaita Vedanta. These are the source of wisdom and it is known as 'Shruti', because it is *apaurusheya*. Later Vedantic literatures have been developed on these texts. We can also trace seeds of Vedantic ideas in the Vedas. But it became a concrete form in Post-veda period. A systematic development can be seen in the works of its first systematic expounder, Gaudapadacharya.

The Mandikya-Karika or the Gaudapada-Karika also known as the Agama-Shastra is the first available systematic treatise on Advaita Vedanta. There can be no doubt that Gaudapada's philosophy is essentially based on the Upanisads, particularly on the Mandukya, the Brahmdaranyaka, and the Chhandogya. Probably he has also drawn upon the Brahma-sutra and the Gita. There can also be no doubt that Gaudapada is much influenced by Mahayana Buddhism by Shunyavada and Vijnanavada. In fact, it can be correctly stated that Gaudapada represents the best that is in Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu. Tradition says that Gaudapadacharya was the teacher of Govindapada who was the teacher of Shankaracharya. Shankara himself most respectfully salutes Gaudapada as his grand-teacher who is the respected (teacher) of (his) respected (teacher), and quotes from and refers to him as the teacher who knows the tradition of the Vedanta. Shankara's disciple Sureshara also refers to him as the 'Revered Gauda.'

Asparshayoga

Now I proceed to deal with Gaudapada's own contribution. It is his doctrine of Vaisharadya or Asparshayoga or Amanibhava. Even this doctrine was hinted at by the Buddhists. But is essentially based on the Upanisads and its development is Gaudapada's own.

Taking his stand on the Brhadaranyaka, the Chhandogya and the Mandukya, Gaudapada identifies the Unborn and Non-dual Absolute with the Atman or Brahman or Amatra or Turiya or Advaita which can be directly realized by Pure Knowledge or Asparshayoga or Vaisharadya or Amanibhava. This Absolute manifest itself in three forms, in Jagrat, Svapna, and Suspti, as Vishva, Taijasa and Prajna. In reality it transcends all the three forms. It is the Turiya or the Furth. It is the Measureless or the Amatra. Pranava or Aumkara is its symbol. Int fact there is no distinction between the symbol and the symbolized. Pranava itself is the Brahman, the Fearless Goal. It is the cause as well as the effect. It is phenomenal as well as noumenal, saguna as well as nirguna, apara as well as para. It is the shining Self or the self-luminous Consciousness.

It is called Vishva (All) when it has the consciousness of outside, it is called Taijasa (Luminous) when it has the consciousness of inside, and it is called Prajna (Intelligent) when it is concentrated consciousness, These correspond to the waking state, dream state and deep sleep state respectively. Vishva enjoys the gross; Taijsa enjoys the subtle; Prajna is only the cause. Turiya is neither cause nor effect. It is called Ishana, Prabhu or Deva. It is all-pervading, capable of removing all sufferings, lord of all, changeless, non-dual, luminous, one without a second. Prajna knows no objects and so it cannot be called even the subject. It is a mere abstraction. It knows nothing, neither itself snor others, neither truth nor falsehood. But Turiya being pure and self-luminons Consciousness is all-seeing. Though duality is absent in Prajna and in Turiya, yet Prajna is connected with deep sleep where the seed of ignorance is present, while Turiya knows no slee. Vishva and Taijasa are connected with dream or false knowledge (anyathagrahana or viksepa) and with sleep or absence of knowledge (agrahana or avarana or laya); Prajna is connected with sleep. In Turiya there is neither sleep nor dream. In dream we know otherwise; in sleep we do not know the truth. The so called waking life is also a dream. When the negative absence of knowledge which is sleep, and the positive wrong knowledge which is dream and waking are transcended, the Fourth, the Goal is reached. The fearless light of the self-luminous Self shines all round. When the individual self (jiva), slumbering in beginning less Ignorance, is awakened, then the Unborn, the Dreamless, the Sleepless, the Non-dual Absolute (atman) is realized. It moves nowhere; there is no going to or coming from it. It is the Lord immanent in the universe abiding in the hearts of all. He alone is a sage (muni) who has embraced this infinite and measureless Aumkara which is the cassation of all duality and which is all bliss. All categories of the intellect are merged in it. All plurality of the phenom ena ceases here. It is realized by the sages who have known the essence of the edas and who are free from fear, anger and attachment.

Atman is like space; the individual souls are like space in jars. When the jars are destroyed, their spaces merge into Space. So do the Jivas merge into the Atman when Ignorance is destroyed by Right Knowledge. Just as, if a particular space in a particular jar is contaminated with dust, smoke etc., all other spaces in all other jars do not become so contaminated, similarly if a particular jiva is contaminated with happiness or misery etc., all jivas do not become so contaminated. Spaces in jars similarly jives differ in forms, functions and names, but there is no difference in the Atman. Just as the space in a jar is neither a transformation nor a modification nor a part of space, similarly a jiva is neither a transformation or a modification nor a part of the Atman. Ultimately there are no grades of reality, no degrees of ruth. The same immanent Absolute is reflected in all pairs of objects related by sweet Reciprocity (madhuvidya), in microcosm as well as in macrocosm, just as the same space is immanent in the outside would as well as inside the stomach.

Just as the Mahayanists say that Buddha, on account of his excellent skill, preached the truth to suit the different needs of the shravaks, the pratyeka-buddhas and the bodhisattvas, similarly Gaudapada also says that the Merciful Veda prescribes three different spiritual stages (ashramas) for the three kinds of people, of lower, middle and higher intellect. Karma and upasana are taught to the lower and the middle, while jnana is taught to the higher. It is only the dualists that quarrel with one another in order to strengthen their respective views. The Advaitin quarrels with none. For the dualists, there is duality from the empirical as well as from the absolute standpoint. For us non-duality is the ultimate truth. For us there is non-duality (advaita) even between unity (advaita) and diversity (dvaita). The neti neti of the Shruti is not solipsism. By negating all plurality and difference, the Shruti manifests the positive Unborn, the Absolute. The fact is that the Absolute cannot be grasped by the intellect and so the best method of describing the Indescribable is by negative terms. But all these negations point to the same ineffable Reality. Duality is the creation of the intellect. When the intellect is transcended (amanibhava), duality and plurality disappear. This is pure Consciousness, devoid of all thought-determinations and imagination. It is Unborn and is not different from the Knowable. The Knowable (jneya) is the Brahman. It is calm and eternal Light. It is the fearless and unshakable Meditation (Samadhi). It is Asparshyoga or the Uncontaminated Meditation difficult to be realized even by great yogins. They are afraid of it, imagining fear where there is really no fear at all. Verily, the absence of fear, the end of suffering, the perpetual wakefulness and the eternal peace, all depend upon the control of mind. When both laya and viksepa are transcended, when the mind does not fall into sleep nor is it distracted again, when it becomes unshakable and free from illusion, it becomes Brahman. The aspirant should be free from attachment, from misery and happiness alike. When the Brahman is realized there is a unique Bliss which transcends misery and happiness and which is called Nirvana. It is indescribable, highest and unshakable. It is Unborn, non-dual and always the same. It can be realized by the Buddhas only. The ignorant perceive only the four-fold covering (avarana) is, is not, both is and is not, and 'neither is nor is not'. The absolute appears to be obscured by these four categories (koti) of the intellect. In fact it is never touched by them. He who has transcended these categories and embraced Pure Self, realizes the Absolute and becomes omniscient. Omniscience results when the trinity of knowledge, knower and known is transcended. This is Transcendental Knowledge (lokottaram jnana). He who has realized this Omniscience, this non-dual Brahman, this Goal which befits a true Brahmana, what else can he desire? All souls by their very nature are always in the state of enlightenment. They are all unborn. All elements of existence, subjective as well as objective, are by their very nature calm from the beginning, Unborn and merged in the Absolute. They are so because they are nothing else than the Brahman itself which is Unborn, Same and Transparent. Those who move in difference can never acquire transcendental purity (vaisharadya). Their case is indeed pitiable. We salute that Highest Reality, says Gaudapada, which is Unborn, Same, pure, and Free from all traces of duality and plurality, according to the best of our ability. He who has become the Buddha, the Enlightened, his knowledge (jnanam) is not related to anything (dharmesunakramate), neither to the subject nor to the object, because it is supra-relational, nor is anything (savrvedharmah), neither the subject nor the object, related to his knowledge, because there is nothing outside his knowledge. He has transcended the duality of the subject and the object and the trinity of knowledge, knower and known. He has become one with Pure Consciousness.

We have seen how Gaudapada agrees with Shunyavada and Vijnanavada. In fact he represents the best in Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu. He has great respect for Buddha. He says: Him one of the Greatest of Men, who has known the truth that the individual souls (dharmah) are identical with the pure self (jneya). I salute Shankara explains that this Greatest of Men is Purusottama or Narayana, the sage of Badarikashrama, the first teacher of the Advaita School. But this may also refer to Buddha.

Gaudapada uses many words which were frequently used in the Mahayana works. It may be pointed out that these words were not the monopoly of the Mahayana. They were the current philosophical coins of the day and Gaudapada had every right to use them. They were the heritage of the language. The impartial spirit of Gaudapada is to be much admired. His breadth of vision, his large-heartedness, his broad intellectual outlook and his impartial spirit add to his glory and greatness. He has respect for Buddha. He frankly admits that in certain respects he agrees with Shunyavadins and Vijnanavadins. But this should never mean that Gaudapada is a crypto-Buddhist, He is a thorough-going Vedantin in and out. His mission is to prove that Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta are not two opposed systems of thought, but only continuation of the same fundamental thought of the Upanishads. He has based his philosophy on the Upanishads. When he says in the end this truth was not uttered by Buddha, what he means is that his own philosophy as well as the philosophy of Buddha and of the Mahayana so far as he agrees with it, both are directly rooted in the Upanishads, that Buddha preached this Upanishadic Truth not by words but by silence, that his (Gaudapada's) preaching is the essence of the Vedanta that it is not an original contribution of Buddha or of Buddhists.

Reality as Pure Consciousness

Gaudapada also agrees with the Vijnanavadins in maintaining that the world is ultimately unreal, for it cannot exist independently and outside of Consciousness which is the only Reality. Even Shankara says that Gaudapada accepts the arguments of the Vijnanavadins to prove the unreality of the external objects.

Ordinary people, says Gaudapada, cling to the view that this world exists, because they say that things are perceived and because there is practical utility. They are always afraid of the doctrine of No-origination. It is for such ordinary people that the Buddhas, the Enlightened from the phenomenal standpoint have proclaimed origination but from the ultimate standpoint. Perception and practical utility are invalid arguments to prove the reality of the world because even in a magical elephant and dream-objects both perception and practical utility may be found.

The Sarvastivadins refute the Vijnanavadins and advocate the existence of external objects. They say that cognition must have its objective cause otherwise the distinction between the subject and the object will be impossible. The external objects must exist because cognition and suffering depend (para-tantra) upon them. This is the view of Sarastivada (para-tantra). The Vijnanavadins reply that the upholders of external objects want to prove that cognition must have a cause. But the objective cause which they adduce is no cause at all. The object exists as an object for the knowing subject; but it does not exist outside of consciousness because the distinction of the subject and the object is within consciousness itself. Consciousness is the only reality and it is never related to any external object, neither in the past nor in the present nor in the future.

Gaudapada is in complete agreement with the Vijnanavadins here. The external world is unreal because it does not exist always, as Reality must do. It is also unreal because the relations which constitute it are all unreal because space, time and causality are impossible. It

is also unreal because it consists of objects and whatever can be presented as an object is unreal. Reality is the Pure Self which is Pure Consciousness and which is at the background of everything. The waking state and the dreaming state are on a par. Both are real within their own order. The water in a dream can quench the thirst in a dream as much as real water can quench real thirst, And both are alike, though not equally, unreal from the ultimate standpoint. The self luminous Self through its own power of illusion imagines itself by itself and it is this self which cognizes the manifold objects. This is the established conclusion of Vedanta. Just as in darkness, a rope is imagined to be a snake; similarly the self is imagined to be individual subjects, mental states and external objects. And just as when the rope is known, the imagined snake vanishes, similarly when the non-dual Atman is realized, the subject-object duality vanishes at once. The luminous self through its own power of illusion becomes itself infatuated. It is Consciousness itself which throbs as the subject and as the object in dream as well as in waking. This whole universe, this entire duality of the subject and the object, is therefore only the imagination of the self. Neither the individual soul nor the external object is ultimately real. Those who see the creation of the individual self or of the external object see the foot-prints of birds in the sky. The external objects are not the creation of the individual self for both are only manifestations of Consciousness. That which has empirical existence cannot be called ultimately real. Consciousness which is immanent in the subject and in the object yet transcends them both. It transcends the trinity of knower, known and knowledge. Consciousness is really Asanga; it has no attachment or connection or relation with anything else. It is called 'Unborn' (aja) from an empirical standpoint only. From the ultimate standpoint, it cannot be called even 'Unborn' for it is really indescribable by intellect. Realizing the truth of No-origination, one bids good-bye to all sorrow and desire and reaches the fearless goal.

We have seen that Gaudapada agrees with Vijñānavāda in maintaining that Reality is Pure Consciousness which manifests itself as, and ultimately transcends, the subject-object duality. We shall see in the next chapter how Śaṅkara bitterly criticizes Vijñānavāda. Much of the criticism of Śaṅkara loses its force against Vijñānavāda since it does not deny the objectivity of the external world, but only its existence outside of consciousness. Śaṅkara himself in a sense admits this. But his view represents a definite advance on Vijñānavāda and also on Gaudapada. He emphasizes that the dream-state and the waking-state are not on a par. He wants to prove the unreality of the external world not by saying that it does not fall outside of consciousness, but by saying that it is essentially indescribable as existent or as non-existent (śaśadanirvachanīya). What we want to stress here is that this view is not an altogether new creation of Śaṅkara. It was developed in Śhūnyavāda and accepted by Gaudapada. Gaudapada also says that the world is unreal because it is essentially indescribable or unthinkable either as existent or as non-existent. He says that just as a moving fire-brand appears as straight or curved, similarly consciousness, when it moves, appears as the subject-object duality. And just as an unmoving fire-brand produces no illusion, similarly unflinching knowledge produces no subject-object illusion. The appearances in a moving fire-brand are not produced by anything else; and when the fire-brand does not move, the appearances also do not rest in anything else; nor do they enter into the fire-brand; nor do they go out of it. Similarly the manifold phenomena are not produced by anything other than consciousness nor do they rest in anything else; nor do they enter into it; nor do they go out of it. They are mere appearance. And they are so because they are essentially indescribable or unthinkable, because they can be called neither real nor unreal, neither existent nor non-existent. This fact is strengthened by Gaudapada's agreement with Śhūnyavāda, by his doctrine of No-origination, by his maintaining

that the world is neither existent nor non-existent nor both. This doctrine of Avidya was further developed by Shankara.

The major tenets of the philosophy of Gaudapada are the nonorigination or ajati and Asparsha-yoga. Gaudapada agrees with Vijnanavadims in maintaining that origination in the absolute point is impossible. He examines various theories of creations and rejects them all. Creation is the sport of god or the enjoyment of God but creation is the very nature of God. It is his inherent nature. It emanates from Him and it only appears to be so. In fact there is no creation at all. Duality is only an appearance. Non-duality is the real truth. The absolute Brahman alone is the real truth. Reality is Nonorigination. Aparshayogais the yoga of transcendence. Through this one realizes the supra-relational reality. Aparshayoga is a new invention of Gaudapada. It has a super sensible or metaphysical reality. It is devoid of sparsha. It is a meditation technique and when he narrates the three avasthas, theory of sadhana is practiced in the transcendental level. The mind has no touch or sparsha with any external object. It reaches in an absolute state of experience, which is equal to Asamprajnata-samadhi. It is the moksha in the Vedantic sense. It is the absolute realization of non-duality. When writing the detailed exposition of the Mandukyopanishad through his Gaudapadiya-karika, he aimed the reaffirmation of the Upanishadic wisdom. Gaudapada quotes many passages from the Brihdaranyaka Upanishad. Brahman is Ishvara. There are Apra Brahman and Para Brahman. Apra Brahman (lower Brahman) is Ishvara who is seated in the hearts of all. In the Gaudapadiya-karika, he describes the three states of existence which correspond to the padas of Omkara. He says the world is non-real and all the appearances are only the illusions of the mind. It is maya or avidya. Non-duality is the truth.

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