

TAT TVAM ASI IN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA: UNIVERSAL IDENTITY REVEALED

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Introduction:

All Schools of Indian Philosophy have basic assertion and on the basis of basic assertion the whole philosophy of a system is developed. The basic assertion of *Advaita Vedānta (AV)* is Non-duality of *Brahman* and *Ātman* (soul). Śaṅkara summarizes his teaching in following *śloka*:

ślokārthenapravakṣyāmiyaduktatīṅgranthakotibhiḥ
Brahma satyamjagan-mithyajīvobrahmaivanāparaḥ

Brahman is real, the world is false/appearance and the soul is only *Brahman (Tat Tvam Asi)* (Balasubramanian, 1980, 108-110), nothing else. *Brahman* is said to be the real. Real, according to *AV* is defined as that which remains un-contradicted at all spans of time.¹ Now, the world and its objects are subject to origination and destruction, therefore world cannot be regarded as real; it is considered as unreal. The world which we experience and which is the ground of all our actions is the product of *avidyā (ignorance)*, everything in the world operates in the backdrop of *avidyā (ignorance)*. Again, the soul or *Self* in the individual is *Brahman*,² the pure consciousness (*Shudhacaitanya*). *Atman*, which is none other than *Brahman* appears as individual self only on account of *avidyā*. *Avidyā* give rise to superimposition.³ Superimposition of various attributes to the soul (like, mind- senses and body), give rise to cognitive error and the terms “‘I’ am fat’, ‘‘I’ am tall’, ‘this is mine’ etc are being used for the self. In other words one starts attributing various attributes to the

¹ *Brahman* is pure consciousness, the inner self/the atman. An argument offered by Śaṅkara for the reality or existence of consciousness is that “none can doubt its existence, for it is involved in doubting. Fire cannot cancel its own heat; even so Self consciousness can never doubt itself” Again in case of deep sleep one experiences peace immediately upon waking. This bliss or peace must be identical with eternal existence and self revealed knowledge because it is experienced in non-duality, beyond the activity of cognition. It reveals the reality of *Brahman*. (See William M Indich 1995, 26-27)

² Self refers to *Brahman* or *ātman*, while self is the individual who is under ignorance and has forgotten the identity between his *Self* and *Brahman*.

³ Superimposition is defined as attributing the property of one thing upon another. See (Śaṅkaraçārya. 1890: 108). All the Advaita Vedāntins agrees about the way of thinking about superimposition as the Śaṅkara has proposed. Śaṅkaraçārya in *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* writes; “Some indeed define the term 'superimposition' as the superimposition of the attributes of one thing on another thing. Others, again, define superimposition as the error founded on the non-apprehension of the difference of that which is superimposed from that on which it is superimposed. Others again, define it as the fictitious assumption of attributes contrary to the nature of that thing on which something else is superimposed. But all these definitions agree in so far as they represent superimposition as the apparent presentation of the attributes of one thing in another thing.” (Śaṅkaraçārya, 1980: 108).

ātman. One uses first person pronoun ‘I’ for oneself and second person pronoun ‘you’ for others who are never recognized as being connected with “I” neither epistemologically nor metaphysically. This unexamined distinction is caused by fundamental ignorance. This ignorance is beginning-less and natural. (Thibaut, 1890, 111). To get rid of the ignorance and to realize the identity between the *Brahman* and *Ātman* is the only objective of human life. On account of ignorance individual thinks itself to be finite, i.e., limited in knowledge, power and other aspects. The individual performs action in the affairs of the world and becomes subject to pain and pleasure. Most importantly, individual is caught up in the transmigratory existence and suffering thereof. Thus, to get rid of suffering or to achieve liberation is the goal of human life. The goal can be attained with the destruction of ignorance.

Ignorance can be destroyed by its opposite, i.e., knowledge. *AV* regards knowledge as only way to liberation; Knowledge of the identity between *ātman* and *Brahman*. *Mahāvākya TatTvamAsi (That thou art)* is referred by Śāṅkara to reveal the truth about individual self. But, if the objective of human life is to realize non-duality of the *Self* with the absolute (i.e., *Brahman*) then why to pursue ethical actions? Why good actions are to be performed for the welfare of other beings or the society. Since social set up is the result of cognitive error woven by ignorance. Given the views of *AV*, it seems that the system does not involve ethics in its framework. This paper intends to reveal with the analysis of the great statement *TatTvamAsi* that the system is infused with ethics. If one analyses the metaphysics of *AV*, one would explore that ethics is inherent in the system. In this context Max Muller remarks that “The Vedānta philosophy has not neglected the important sphere of ethics; but on the contrary, we find ethics in the beginning, ethics in the middle and ethics in the end...” (Radhakrishnan, 1913, 168)

TatTvamAsi is one of the four prominent *Mahāvākyas*.⁴⁶ The statement is repeatedly used by teacher Uddalaka Aruni to his son Shvetaketu. Uddalaka Aruni

⁴⁶ The other three are 1) They are: *Prajñānām Brahman* (Consciousness is *Brahman*) in the *Aitareya Upanishad* of the *Rig-Veda*. 2) *Aham Brahmāsmi* (I am *Brahman*) in the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajur-Veda*. 3) *Ayam Atmā Brahma* (this *Atman* is *Brahman*) in the *Mandukya Upanishad* of the *Atharva Veda*. The first statement, Consciousness is *Brahman*, explains the true nature of *Brahman*. The second statement is the self-assessment from the seeker when he/she recognizes his/her true divine nature. Third statement refers to practice or formula for the seeker to discover the Oneness of *Atman* and the *Brahman*.

instructs his son in the nature of *Brahman*, the supreme reality. Uddalaka sends his son Svetaketu to *Gurukula* for learning the *Vedas*. Svetaketu accordingly spends twelve full years in learning the scriptures and thus returns home with the vanity of being learned. His father asks him: My dear, why are you so conceited? Have you learnt that, by learning which the unheard becomes heard, the unknown becomes known, the unperceived becomes perceived? How is it? Asks Svetaketu, and the father gives the reply. It is just as by knowing one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known: for whatever the modifications of the effects are, they are only names, and have their origin in speech. One who knows the cause knows all its effects, since the cause and its effects are non-different. Then, Uddalaka gives various examples for ascertaining the cause of the universe. In the same way, if you know "*Brahman*" then the entire universe that cannot exist without him is also known."He continued his teaching and concluded with the statement, *Tat TvamAsi* or "You are that". In simple terms the individual jiva is *Brahman*.

Analysis of Tat Tvam Asi: The statement *TatTvamAsi* literally means the identity between the individual and the God⁴⁷. But the statement should not be understood in its literal meaning. 'Tvam' refers to the individual, i.e., finite being. While 'Tat' means God or *Īsvara* in *AV* and *Asi* refers to identity between the two. Literal or primary meaning of the word Tvam is individual consciousness connected with the mind and the sense of ego and the word Tat means that which has *avidyā* its limitation, known as *Īsvara*/God; the creator of the universe, omniscient, omnipotent etc. Since the meanings are incompatible one has to resort to the implied or the secondary meaning (*lakṣyārtha*). In addition to literal or primary meaning there is secondary meaning or *Lakṣaṇā* (Datta, 1960, 288-290).When in a given context the primary meaning of a word is unintelligible the word is credited with secondary meaning related to the primary meaning. The famous example is: The village is on the *Gaṅgā*. Since the primary meaning (village on the water) in the given context is impossible, the sentence; the village is on the *Gaṅgā* is understood as the village is on the bank of the river. It is clear that whenever

⁴⁷ The literal meaning of a word is its original, basic meaning.

there is incompatibility in understanding the primary meaning of a word one should resort to its secondary meaning or *lakṣaṇā*. *Lakṣaṇā* is divided into three kinds:

1. Exclusive (*jahallakṣaṇā*): In this type, the primary meaning is completely abandoned and the new secondary meaning is posited, e.g. the village is on the Ganges.⁴⁸
2. Inclusive (*Ajahallakṣaṇā*): This type includes the primary meaning in addition to the secondary meaning. E.g. protect the ghee from the crows. The meaning of the sentence would be to protect the ghee not only from crows but also from other animals.
3. Quasi inclusive (*jahadajahallakṣaṇā*): In this type of *lakṣaṇā* a part of primary meaning is preserved while rest is rejected, e.g. 'This is that Devadatta.' In a sentence like 'this is that Devadatta', the term 'that' refers to the Devadatta as determined by the past time and space and the term 'this' refers to the same Devadatta as determined by the present time and space. The sentence does not mean that the two incompatible determinants 'this' and 'that' are identical; nor does it mean that the person determined in the term 'this' is identical with him when determined in the term 'that'. It only means the identity of substantive Devadatta, by rejecting the incompatible elements. The two qualified cannot be identical; but they refer to the same substantive, Devadatta. So the identity here refers to the individual Devadatta, who is unrelated to the time, past or presents (Datta, 1960, 290).

Śaṅkara uses this special kind of *lakṣaṇā* called *jahad-ajahallakṣaṇā* or *bhāga-tyāga-lakṣaṇā*⁴⁹ to bring out the significance of '*TatTvam-Asi*'. In the *mahavākya Tat tvamasi* one part is left out and other part is retained. *Tvam* (thou) as part of a sentence does not mean the person or individual *jīva* with limited intelligence, but stripped of all individual attributes such as limiting adjuncts (like mind, senses and body), *Tat* (that) means the universal soul, stripped of all qualifications such as omniscience, omnipotence etc. It is the only pure consciousness in the individual soul that is identified with that in the universal soul or *Brahman*.

⁴⁸ The secondary or implied meaning is village is on the bank of the river Ganges.

⁴⁹ It is also called '*Bhagatyagalakṣaṇā*' (literally: part abandoning implication).

Such instance where a word is signifying a qualified entity gives up one part of its primary meaning and retains another part (the part which is excluded is the limiting adjuncts in the individual and attributes like omniscience, etc, in the *Īśvara* or God and the part which is retained is the pure consciousness which belongs both to the universal soul, i.e., *Brahman* and Individual self) belongs to the exclusive-non-exclusive implication or *jahadajahallakṣaṇā* in the view of *AV* (Datta, 1960, 250-252). This type of implication helps the system of *AV* to establish the identity between the self and the *Brahman* which is the main or sole purpose of *AV*.

The *ātman* (*Self*) whose essential nature is pure consciousness is without any attribute, devoid of any type of activity and difference. However when mind,⁵⁰ senses and body are attributed to the *Self*, then the *Self* becomes an individual self- the agent and the enjoyer of all activities. The mind-senses and the body are the product of ignorance and have no reality of their own. These are regarded as unreal as opposed to real. Due to the adjuncts like mind-senses and body the Self becomes finite. The result of superimposing these adjuncts is that the individual thinks oneself to be finite in knowledge, power and other aspects. In *jahadajahallakṣana*, the notion of mind, senses and body is to be given up and the original status, i.e., pure consciousness is to be kept. *Īśvara* or god is the creation of human mind under the influence of ignorance, just as a man with defected sight sees double moon, similarly human beings under illusion construct the notion of God and takes it - to be the supreme ruler of everything. While applying *lakṣaṇā* the attributes attributed to *Brahman* are left out and the pure consciousness is retained (Radhakrishnan, 1999, 554).

The mahavākya implies the identity of objective reality and subjective self on the one hand, and the influence of *avidyā* (illusion producing ignorance) on the aspirant on the other. The identity of *ātman* and *Brahman* is already there as an accomplished fact. Knowledge of it is something like discovery of a necklace around the neck of the wearer which she has lost sight of due to forgetfulness. But the wearer being unmindful of the presence of the necklace would not be able to discover it and confess her forgetfulness unless someone else reminds her of it. In like manner the statement, '*That Thou Art*', is uttered by the instructor and known or meditated by the

⁵⁰ Mind is also regarded as internal organ or *antahkarana* in *AV*. Pure consciousness veiled by *avidyā* becomes conditioned and "the concept of "I" took place. The 'I' leads to all selfish activities in the present state of existence.

aspirant himself that the ignorance of the aspirant is suddenly dispelled and he realizes the real, i.e., pure consciousness/*Brahman*. One may ask that removal of *avidyā* and realization of the truth of *mahāvākya 'TatTvamAsi'* leads to cessation of all actions, whether ethical or unethical. In this context it is important to understand that *avidyā* is not a thing of some kind. *Avidyā* is not absence of knowledge. It is simply wrong knowledge about the entities of the world. Some later Vedāntins have reified and hypostatized ignorance and treated it as if it is a thing of some kind. Thus, *avidyā* is simply wrong notion about the world (Rao Srinivasa, 2012, 132) After removal of *avidyā* a person does not become action-less, but the attitude toward performing actions is reformed. This point can be made clearer with the example of nature of a liberated person: A man of illumination, i.e., a person who has the intuition of *Brahman* while living has no wants and is impelled by no desire. He is known as *jīvanmukta*.

Jīvanmukta has nothing to accomplish in the world or in the next. Nor is there anything left for him to be attained here or hereafter. But a person is embodied due to the *prārabdha karma*⁵¹ he has done in his previous life and in order to enjoy the fruit of *prārabdha karma* person is embodied. So long as redemption of *prārabdha karma* is not complete even the self-realized cannot achieve final release or bodily death. *Prārabdha karma* perishes by enjoyment. Such person can continue to take part in worldly actions without endangering his salvation (Max Weber, 2012, 185). The knowledge of Self only protects one from entanglement of action (*Karma*- performed with desire leading to bear fruit in future life).⁵² One cannot dispense with actions as long as one has body. So, both the ethical and unethical actions are retained, but the nature of knower becomes such that he is inclined towards ethical actions. In *Bahagavadgītā*, it is mentioned that liberated person acts in accordance with duty while inwardly remaining detached; he acts as if he acted not. It is not the case that morality or the sense of good and bad fades away at this stage; rather ethical actions naturally flow from the liberated individual. Thus, after hearing the truth of the

⁵¹ *Prārabdha* is that portion of the past karma that is responsible for the present. These are the ripe and fructuous actions and reactions. The things that you did in the past make you what you are today. It cannot be avoided or changed, but only exhausted by being experienced.

⁵² Entanglement of action means that knower of the Self has body but his sense of having body is annihilated so he has no desires and whatever he performs is without desire and does not bring results on account of which he is to be reborn.

mahavakya actions are very much performed but the knower becomes aware that actions performed without desire of the fruits (*Niskama karma*) are not binding. The Knower has awareness of both the ethical and unethical action and he follows the ethical path; both the paths rest on the differences between 'Self' and 'Other', but in former path there is no conceptual difference. For example, there is difference between the mother and her child; they are two - the mother is one and her child is "the other". But this difference does not lead to any conceptual discrimination against the child by its mother because the mother does not use the difference between herself and her child to discriminate against the child. She does not discriminate because she never looks upon her child as truly another (Rao 2012, 205).

Similarly after knowing the truth of *mahāvākya* "*TatTvamAsi*" the sense of performing actions remains (in *jivanmukta* state) but the conceptual framework of the liberated Self changes on account of which the ethical path is followed by him. On the other hand one who is unaware of the truth works under the framework which weaves discriminations leading to social chaos. Though he experiences pain and pleasure like an ordinary person, he has already known their nothingness and irrelevance. He is indifferent to pure and impure, auspicious and inauspicious, good and bad etc inasmuch as he is not affected by them or bound by them, and because the evil and the base has no place in his mind. He is neither bound by scriptural injunctions nor does he wantonly violate them; he is beyond them. In spite of this freedom, *Jivanmukta's* virtuous behavior before the dawn of the Knowledge remains with him as part of his habits. Thus, it has been said that virtuosity (such as adherence to Yama, commands etc.) will come to the Self-realized person spontaneously, though for him it is not an instrument to achieve anything. Thus, the liberated soul is directed only towards ethical actions, since one cannot expect selfishness, cruelty or performance of unethical actions on part of liberated person. So ethics is integrated to spirituality. One cannot be spiritual without being ethical.

Pure Consciousness: The Enworlded subjectivity: Pure consciousness is the ground of existence. All else is superimposed on the pure consciousness. But how the absolute, non-dual, unqualified consciousness gets involved in the phenomenal world and perceives everything in terms of duality of 'I' and 'You'. This is the basic problem which the system of *AV* faces: the problem of 'enworlded

subjectivity.⁵³ Balasubramanian defines the problem of Enworlded Subjectivity in the *Advaita* as follows:

There is on the one hand, the dichotomy between consciousness and the world of objects presented to consciousness; there is, on the other hand, involvement of consciousness in the objects of the world. How is it possible, *Advaita* asks, that consciousness which is essentially different from everything else presented to it as its object, get itself involved in the objects of the world surrounding it, losing its identity in such a way that it is not even reckoned as an entity in its own along with other objects? (Balasubramanian, 1992, 77)

Enworlded consciousness and the object presented to consciousness are two different entities, but when the consciousness gets engaged in the objects of the world and does not realize its essence as real then the problem of enworlded subjectivity arises. The philosophy of Śāṅkara deals with the problem of enworlded subjectivity, i.e., the *Self* being involved in the world, falsely identifies itself with the world. The dichotomy between consciousness and the world of objects presented to consciousness shows that the objects presented to consciousness are different from it and therefore object of consciousness. While consciousness which reveals the object is only the subject. The object which is unconscious can never be designated as *Self*. But, it is natural for individual self to regard the objects like mind, senses and body as conscious. Since, it is the mind which thinks, it is the body which feels and acts; the individual under ignorance thinks mind and body as conscious. Superimposition of the mind, senses and body on the consciousness leads to false identity of the *Self* with the objects giving rise to day-to-day activities. All our worldly transactions comprising all kinds of activities - conative and affective (*loka vyavahāra*) rests on the discrimination between subject and the object.

Individual self cannot be the owner of anything that is different from it,⁵⁴ be it mind, sense organs, the body or any external object outside one's mind, senses and body. (Balasubramanian, 1992, 77-93). The nature of *Self* or consciousness is such that being the principle of awareness in human knowledge and experience, it remains untouched and unaffected by all that is known or experienced. All the experienced

⁵³ Enworlded subjectivity simply means subject or individual self actively engaged or involved in the affairs of the world.

⁵⁴ Individual self is different from mind senses and body because the true nature of individual self is pure consciousness while the mind, senses and body are devoid of consciousness. They are sometimes present and sometimes absent (e.g. in deep sleep) But the *Self* remains constantly present in all the stages (sleep, dream and deep sleep).

objects cannot belong to the *Self* or can affect it. This means attributing anything to the *Self* is logically impossible, because all that we know, think and speak of cannot be about the *Self*. It reveals the fact that conception of self taken in our normal activities is always predicated. Again, the other individual self is always seen along with predications (mind, senses and body); while *AV* establishes that the *Self* (pure consciousness) is beyond all the predications and is to be realized as one and non-plural. This realization of the *Self*⁵⁵ (*Self* without predications) leads to identification of one's self as not different from another, i.e., self-in-other and other-in-self (Sarukkai 1997, 1408).

Ethical Interpretation of Tat TvamAsi: Identity between *Self* and *Brahman* reveals that all the living beings have one ground; it leads to the view that there should be Universal identity which leads to greater social harmony among all the beings. In this context S. Radhakrishnan advocates that a careful observer would find that ethics is inherent in the metaphysics of *AV*. According to *AV* metaphysics, *Brahman* is the sole reality and individuals are modification of *Brahman*. In saying this *AV* postulates absolute oneness of all the existence: “In a *Brahmin* endowed with wisdom and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, as also in a dog and dog eater, the wise see the same”. This non-dualism requires us to look upon all the creation as one, upon all thinking beings and the objects of all thought as non-different. Individual is enjoined to cultivate a spirit of non-difference. (Radhakrishnan, 1913, 68-70). If one man is non-different from other man then there will be the sense of oneness and this sense of oneness will cultivate the ethics of love and brotherhood. Thus, the metaphysics of *AV* naturally occupies ethics inherently. Moreover, the objective of *AV* is realization of identity between *Self* and the *Brahman*, this realization leads to cultivation of love towards all the creatures. As the whole creation is one.

The objective is realization of the *Brahman* but this objective can be achieved by knowledge. Again, knowledge is attained only after following ethical actions like non-violence, charity, self control (control over mind, senses and body). Ethical actions purify the mind, enabling it to meditate over self and realize the identity (Śāṅkara, 1911, 750). In *Atmabodha* Śāṅkara makes it clear that a highest degree of

⁵⁵ This realization is with the study of scriptural statements like “*Tat tvamasi*”.

virtue is pre-required for receiving the doctrine of Self.... this emphasis on virtue being purified from evil is repeated in *Upadeshasasri*, where Śaṅkara writes “the knowledge of *Brahman* should be given to him whose mind has been pacified, who has controlled his sense, and is freed from all defects, who has practiced the duties enjoined by scriptures and is possessed of good qualities, who is always obedient to the teacher (Kazemi, 2006: 19-20). The virtues needed to be cultivated both by the person who aspires for liberation (*nihisreyas*) and also for one who does not aspire to attain liberation i.e., person involved in worldly affairs. As, these virtues are helpful for achieving *abhudayā*, i.e., material prosperity. Truthfulness consists in eschewing falsehood, deceit, hypocrisy, pride and boastfulness. Non-deceit and non-crookedness in speech, body and mind constitute truthfulness. It is the foundation of knowledge of *Brahman* (Sinha, 1952, 595-598). Celibacy destroys afflictions, and purifies mind. Virtues help to attain knowledge, at the same time these virtues like truthfulness, non-violence, self-control also assists in constructing a peaceful society. Thus, the objective is realization of *Brahman* and this objective also strengthens the ethics.

Misconception about *AV* that it is an anti-ethical system is based on initial misreading that *Brahman* and the world are two numerically different entities. But this is not true. *Brahman* is the ground upon which the world of phenomenon is projected, all other existence depends upon *Brahman* for its reality and being (Swami Madhvananda, 1921, 222). Moreover, the world is not an erroneous construct. Śaṅkara assigns empirical reality to the world (Śaṅkara 1965, 306). In Śaṅkara’s schema there are three levels of reality: *pāramārthika* (transcendental/absolute), *vyāvahārika* (empirical) and *prātibhāsika* (illusory). The *Brahman* is the *pāramārthikasattā* (*absolute reality*), the world of space-time-causality belongs to *vyāvahārika*, while erroneous perception of the objects like silver in the shell, snake in the rope, are at the *prātibhāsika*. Śaṅkara admits that the world is as real as anything possibly is, from the empirical level of reality (Apte, 1960, 306-307). It is undoubtedly true that the main presupposition - *Brahman* is real, the world is false and the individual self is no other than the universal soul (*Brahman Satyam, jaganmithyā, jīvo Brahmaivanāparaḥa*) (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 64) is found in the writings of Śaṅkara. This assertion indicates that the plurality of the world is false or unreal because it disappears in that moment when the effect of ignorance disappears.

Thus, the world is unreal from the standpoint of transcendental reality. The world is regarded as real (empirically) because it is being experienced, and notably *Brahman* is the substrate or ground on which this world of plurality appears. Thus, the world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal, but it is relatively 'real'. The world is real in relation to the *Brahman* and apart from *Brahman* world can have no existence (Swami Madhvanand, 1921, 102-104). Moreover, prior to the realization of *Brahman* all the transactions of the phenomenal world are real enough (Śaṅkarācārya, 2005, 57). Again, this remark can be strengthened by Śaṅkara's writing in the *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya*;

It would be reasonably sustainable to understand that prior to realization of *Brahman* as the self of all, all transactions (of the phenomenal world) for the time being are real enough, even as the transactions in dreams are real enough (for the time being) until waking consciousness returns.....Therefore prior to the realization of *Brahma* as the Self of all, all the worldly and religious transactions based on the scriptures, are reasonably sustainable i.e., valid, even as ordinary man, while he is asleep and dreaming, sees all the high and low entities, and definitely considers his experience quite as real as they are when they are directly perceived, and has no notion, then, of their having only an unreal appearance (of direct perception) (Apte, 1960, 306-307).

From the above statement, it is obvious that *AV* advocates empirical realism. Any experience at the empirical level cannot be rejected outright. Thus, worldly actions do not rest under error, but have their worth. The reality, can be viewed from two standpoints or experience, first from the standpoint of relational experience (*yuktidarśana*) in which one relates oneself with the entities of the world; and secondly from the standpoint of the experience of ultimate being (Shrivastava, 1968, 57-80). Śaṅkara emphasizes that from the former standpoint (empirical level) reality of all our experiences, including identity of the 'Self' with the body and creation of its co-relate 'other' and the behaviors resulting from the creation of these images cannot be denied, but at the level of the later experience (transcendental level or experience of ultimate being, i.e., *Brahman*), the sense of difference between the self and other gets removed (Śaṅkara, 1965; 306-312). Moreover, the activities performed with the

apprehension of the distinction (resulting in social disharmony) between self and other (particularly unethical activities) also get faded (Shrivastava, 1968, 105-117).⁵⁶

The predications to the *Self* result in the feeling of distinction and separation from other selves. This feeling gives rise to a particular attitude or behavior towards others, which is the root of most of the misery and suffering. In *AV*, metaphysical ignorance occupies a significant position. It is only because of ignorance that the cycle of birth, death, pain and pleasure are associated with the individual self. Individual self without knowing its essential nature gets involved in the affairs of the world and perform actions. The results of actions lead to future life involving pain and pleasure. Moreover, it is on account of these painful experiences in the “life-world” that self experiences bondage. This bondage generates an inner urge to *know the Real* and attain liberation. *AV* advocates that in yearning for liberation (*mumukṣa*) from suffering, one realizes that the cause of the suffering is ignorance about the real nature of the self. While everything is *Self*⁵⁷ and all the predications to the *Self* rests upon a mistake, then such a mistaken thinking leads to recognizing the reality of the other as different from the self. There occurs discrimination between self and other due to this misconception, which leads to consequences which are not good for the individual and the society as a whole.

One of the causes of social problems is the ego or *ahaṃkāra*.⁵⁸ Sibajiban Bhattacharya defines the function of the ego as,

... ‘Ego’ the source of ‘I’ consciousness, owner of all mental states and acts of the individual, restricts a person and separates him from other persons and the objects of the world, is the center around which all thoughts and actions revolve, usurps all functions of pure consciousness as the foundation of a person, is the principle of identity and identifies itself with the mind-body complex (Bhattacharya, 1992, 44-76).

⁵⁶ Since at this level there remains no plurality. The self experiences oneness of all the beings.

⁵⁷ It means that the all are one, i.e., *Self* *Brahman* but on account of limitation the one appears many. In *Ātmabodha* Śaṅkara writes “it is the association with the *upādhis* of various material bodies that makes *Brahman* appear as gods, angels, men, animals, birds, trees and stones” (Śaṅkarācārya 1946: 58-60).

⁵⁸ Ego is the aspect of mind that expresses individuality. It is known in Sanskrit as the *ahaṃkāra* ‘*aham*’ means I and ‘*Kara*’ means maker. So it is the composer of individuality and distinguish itself from other ‘I’s’ (ego’s). It is the ego that gives the sense of ‘I’ or mine. In every action one is conscious of oneself as ‘I am the doer.’ The ego takes place due to association of the *Self* with the limiting adjuncts (mind, senses and body). Ego is the covering over the *Self*.

It reveals the fact that the ego is the major vehicle which carries all the activities. The ego expresses itself as 'I' or 'mine' and the idea of self identity is created. This ego is the foundation on which all other identities are framed like those of family, religion, nationality etc (Rao, 2012, 202-206). Ego constantly strives to be always right, always superior, never wrong and never inferior. It constantly seeks self-importance, power and superiority over others. The root of most of the conflicts in the society is ego or image of the self constructed under ignorance (Rao, 2012, 201-202).

All activities in the world are associated with self and other, so the distinction between them plays an important role.⁵⁹ However, if the source of this distinction is not properly understood, it may lead to chaos in the society, because this distinction is the source of further discrimination based on caste, color, creed, sex, and religion. This discrimination is an extension of the distinction between self and the other and most of the problems like social discrimination, exploitation and political oppression of the people from one group by the people from another group is generally fuelled by the feeling that they are different, inferior and deserved to be ruled and exploited.⁶⁰ And this is not all; most of the present conflicts due to economic competition are also rooted in this distinction between self and other. Instead of helping the economically weak, there are trade wars going on, which have the potential to trigger a full scale armed conflict between nations. It is due to this distinction between self and other and hatred for the other (root cause of the distinction is our ignorance about the truth of identity between the *Self (tvam)* and *Brahman (tat)*) that today we have economies based on violent conflicts which justifies the production of guns, tanks, missiles and even nuclear weapons, which can annihilate the population of entire earth many times.

Hence, it is crucial to note that *AV* goes beyond this distinction by teaching the oneness of all selves (the universal identity). The oneness of all implies absence of the 'other.' rather the absence of feeling of distinction between one and another.

⁵⁹ Every action presupposes a duality between one self and other. At the empirical level it is difference between one self and other that makes possible all the worldly affairs (*lokavyavahāra*).

⁶⁰ We have numerous examples of this in the human history. Nazi genocide of Jews is well documented and recent examples include conflict in the Middle East among various factions divided on religious grounds and again violent clashes between Burmese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslim.

Thus, once the feeling of distinction (discrimination based on this distinction) between self and other is removed, the treating of 'other' in an undesirable way is also obliterated. When we consider others as different from us, we do not bother about any harm caused to the other, by our actions, but on the other hand, if we have some concern for other, it is because we are looking upon the other person as not 'other' anymore. Rather, we are treating him as an extension of ourselves (Rao, 2012, 202-206). It is natural for us to desire to preserve one's own identity and existence. However, in its course, one may behave and act inappropriately for self subsistence. This many a times cause harm to the other. In sharp contrast, once the mahavakya *Tat Tvam Asi* is understood and realized, the individual self recognizes its unity and non-difference with the other, it functions in an amicable fashion. This sense of 'oneness of all' brings transformation in the attitude of individual self, which further leads towards an ideal, peaceful and conflict free society.⁶¹

An objection is often raised that if "All is one" then why to perform actions since actions are always directed towards other? To this, it may be said that absence of the 'other' does not establish elimination of the 'other' or it does not mean that elimination of 'other' leads to complete in-action. As it is said above that before the realization of *Brahman* all the transactions of the phenomenal world are real enough. Even after realization the world does not become chimera like horn's hair, rather one's understanding or attitude towards the worldly affairs gets changed. The liberated or realized person performs actions in an unattached way. Moreover, it is impossible to think that if true nature has been realized (one realizes that he is Brahman, the Pure consciousness) then action is not to be taken over. Because all the actions are for the person with the body it is on account of body, mind, and senses that actions are possible and these actions are unavoidable. The wise do not, therefore, renounce action by abstaining from action - which is, after all, an impossible task. Instead, they renounce action through knowledge. They continue to

⁶¹It is possible to have conflict free society if every individual in the society understands and performs his duty well, the society can be a beautiful place to live in. No doubt the society has always being in conflict. Although people realize the importance of a peaceful world, but the manmade disasters are far worse than any natural catastrophe. Disagreements, difference over ideologies, beliefs etc are bound to cause conflicts. But man has a fragile aspect also. It is a proverb that 'man is harder than a rock and also more fragile than an egg'. This fragile aspect of man is to be explored and this can be explored with the message of *AV*. The lesson of non-difference of one individual self from other will scatter the seed of brotherhood and love among beings. This can be a boon for the peaceful society.

act, but no longer identify themselves as the doer of those actions. The sense of non-doership leads to action which will not bring any fruit in future life and there will be no transmigration thereof.

Conclusion:

On a careful analysis of the *mahāvākya TatTvamAsi*, it can be explored that the great statement *TatTvamAsi* is a vehicle for greater social cohesion. The statement emphasizes on the one-ness or identity of one's self with the *Brahman* (and one-ness or non-difference among all the human beings) and the spirit of ethics lies in identification of one's self with other person. In other words, the statement carves out a ground for the essential one-ness of beings which brings about significant attitudinal transformation. If one understands the essential unity of all beings (even if one does not realize the *jīva-Brahman* identity in a transcendental sense), one's attitude towards others and all actions unto others will incur significant transformation. It can be argued from the side of the *AV* that, despite refraining from theorizing morality, the system creates a significant foundation for moral living in which any normative (deontological or consequentialist) concerns are not the primary issues, but the consciousness that works behind all knowing and doing is what matters. In brief, the norms of action or the consequence of it are of secondary importance; and the attitudinal transformation before all actions is of primary importance.

The *AV*'s position can also be seen in view of the fact that despite knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, human beings are not prompted to genuinely engage with the right and refrain from the wrong. A right inducement into virtuous life demands or presupposes a consciousness or a preceding cognition, which in the case of *AV* is represented by the great statement *TatTvamAsi* which further teaches the 'essential unity of self and other'. Without this consciousness as necessary condition for virtuous living, mere knowledge of good and bad does not prompt human beings to lead a morally commendable life. In ordinary experiences, the said consciousness is instantiated by our expressions of empathy, care, cooperation, love, etc. When one portrays these traits, the essential human unity is portrayed in fact.

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