Hermeneutics of Sankara

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I

H.G. Gadamer in his book, *Truth and Method* ties all human experience to language. He states that it is in language that we articulate the experience of the world insofar as this experience is common. Gadamer is of the view that hermeneutic experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language. He supports the view that the process of interpretation is important in language. This process according to him is a circular one, involving the movement from the part to whole and whole to the parts. This means that in order to understand the meaning of a sentence, the parts, namely, the meaning of individual words is to be understood. Similarly, in order to understand the meaning of a paragraph, we need the understanding of individual sentences, and in order to understand the paragraph, we require an understanding of the language. Thus, Gadamer stresses that language is interwoven with sentences and words, and understanding is possible only through the implicit relation between the whole and parts. This led Gadamer to say that all understanding is interpretation. Understanding includes always an element of application. Understanding, interpretation and application is a triunity, and hence is inseparable, says Gadamer. Ultimately, understanding and interpretation are the same. He says: "Since the romantic period we can

longer hold the view that, should there be no direct understanding, interpretative ideas are drawn on, as needed, out of a linguistic storeroom in which they are lying ready. Rather, language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized. The mode of realization of understanding is interpretation.... All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language."

For Gadamer, interpretation is always open-ended which means no interpretation is ever final, thus allowing always-new interpretation. This means that understanding is always application. Here, one must be little careful in understanding the term, "application", because for Gadamer, the term does not mean applying something to something. By application, he means that we see a text or a situation as already significant. Our understanding grows out of a particular context and when the context changes, the need for re-interpretation arises. But Gadamer claims that re-interpretation may lead to changes in our situation, but we cannot free ourselves completely from our given tradition and situation. Here the role of the interpreter is important. The intention of the author, holds Gadamer, is an inadequate standard of interpretation because it is non-dialectical. He considers understanding, as essentially dialectical. This means that new meaning is born in the interplay that takes place continuously between the past and the present. In every interpretation, the text gives new meaning.

For Gadamer, the notion of hermeneutics can be better understood in terms of the relationship between language and interpretation. Habermas correctly says that with Gadamer, language acquires a third dimension. The unity of language, which disappeared in the pluralism of language-games, is dialectically restored in the context of tradition. Language exists only as something traditional, for tradition mirrors language. Language is said to be the medium of hermeneutical experience. Hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of language but the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language. Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people. All knowledge of ourselves as well as of the world comes to us through language. For Gadamer, language is not a mere tool we use, but something which precedes us and whose play we submit to. We can only think in language, and just this residing of our thinking in language is the profound enigma that language presents to thought. Language

grows with thought, or rather thought grows with it. In the ultimate analysis, they may be identical. Hermeneutic method is intimately related with language. Habermas says that what distinguishes hermeneutic circle from being a vicious one is the connectedness of language and the practical social context of life. Language is compared to that of play or a game. In a game, Gadamer says that the players are more played on than playing. Similarly, language speaks us, rather than we speak it. In language, we are always already in language, even before we could analyse or speak about things. Heidegger's statement that language is the house of being is echoed in Gadamer's statement, "Being that can be understood is language".

According to Gadamer, knowing a language does not mean knowing rules and structures but rather knowing how to make oneself understood by others regarding the subject matter. In his essay, "Semantics and Hermeneutics", he argues how language in its life as conversation constantly presses against the limits of established conventions and moves between the sedimented meanings and usages that are at its best and the new that it strives to express. Understanding according to Gadamer, is linguistic. Further he says that the task of understanding and interpreting always remains meaningful. "Understanding is language-bound" says Gadamer. Gadamer strongly believes that language is not only an object in our hands; it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world.

Gadamer is of the view that in a hermeneutical dialogue or conversation, which takes place between the interpreter and the text, there should be equality and reciprocity. This means that in a genuine dialogue both the conversational partners deal with a common subject, a common question about which they converse. It is because a dialogue is always about something. Gadamer suggests that the tradition builds upon the "excess of meaning" which it finds in the text, excess which goes beyond the intention of the author. He says: "The meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always also productive one. It suffices to say that one understands *differently when one understands at all.*"

II

In the above section, we have seen how in Gadamer's hermeneutics, language has been playing a significant role. In the following section, we see that parallel to this in Sankara also there is a interplay of language and thus see how there

can be a dialogue between the West and the East in the context of hermeneutical understanding. The main purpose of this essay is to show that both in the West as well in the East, language occupies a prominent place. The hermeneutic tools are not alien to Indian Philosophical tradition. The Indian philosophers have been practicing their own hermeneutics in order to show that language is the core of hermeneutics.

The relation between language and thought is a fundamental problem in linguistic philosophy. Patanjali says that the expression of thought is the sole purpose that is served by the use of words.[1] "We can only think in language, and just this residing of our thinking in a language is the profound enigma that language presents to thought", says Gadamer.[2] The Upanisads say that thought and speech are interchangeable. It is said that mind finds itself fully expressed in speech and speech has its seat in the mind. Sankara in his commentary on the *Brahmasutra* says that speech (*vak*) is the product of the mind.[3] The linguistic analysis of Indian thought can be traced from the Vedic times. Linguistic issues such as the origin of language, different forms of speech, etc., were discussed in the Vedic literature. Speech (*vak*) is regarded as the creation of Gods which they have put everywhere.[4] Sometimes, *vak* is known by other names as in, *sarasvati* and *bharati. Vak* in its ultimate sense is the same as *Brahman.* The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* says: "*vak vai brahmeti*", "speech truly, is *Brahman*".[5] A study into the philosophy of language in the Indian tradition would reveal the fact that the science of semantics in India is a harmonizing force between sensuous and supra - sensuous experience. The Indian philosophy of language has two dimensions, says H.G. Coward.[6] The phenomenal and metaphysical are these two dimensions. J.G. Arapura also says that Indian philosophers have carefully avoided the "two reductionistic mistakes". They neither reduce language to being a merely human convention having only scientific or factual referents nor fall into the error of metaphysical reductionism which devalues the meanings of human words where language ends up in obscure mysticism.[7]

1   Mahabhasya under Ver,15. Panini, 3.1.7.

2   H.G. Gadamer, "Man and Language" in Philosophical Hermeneutics, D.E. Linge, (Tr.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, pp.61-62.

3   BSSB, I, ii, 4.

4   Rgveda, 10.10.125.3.

5   BU, IV, i, 2.

6   H.G. Coward, Sphota Theory of Language, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, p.3.

7   J.G. Arapura, "Some Perspectives on Indian Philosophy of Language" in H.G. Coward and K. Sivaraman (ed) Revelation in Indian Thought, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, p.20.

Analysis is a way of grouping together heterogeneous philosophies interested in analyzing linguistic or conceptual units.[8] The language analysis in the West and the East have grown and developed independently of each other. In spite of this, we find certain similarities between the two. Both contemporary analytical philosophy and the classical Indian philosophy are interested in the problems of knowledge, the varieties of meaning and reference etc. Many essays comparing Western theories and Indian classical theories of meaning and reference have appeared.[9] The analysis of knowledge in its various aspects has been a favourite subject for the Indian thinkers of ancient times. In Öaôkara's writings, especially in his commentary on the *Brhmasutras*, we find a very good analysis of language and problems connected with it. Advaita Vedanta of Shankara is generally considered to be the crowning achievement of the philosophical speculations of ancient Hindu India. He stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank of religious thinkers of India[10]. His *bhasyas*, particularly those on the *Upanisads* and the *Brahmasutra* are important not only because they are the most detailed and thoroughgoing in character, but also because they develop a doctrine which, in the words of George Thibaut, is characterized by incomparable "boldness, depth and subtlety of speculation".[11]

It must be noted that Sankara in his interpretation of the *prasthanatraya* adopts the hermeneutic-analytical method. The *prasthanatraya* is the source for Advaita, which rests on *Sruti*, *smrti*, and *tarka*. The *Upanisads* represent *Sruti-prasthana*, the *Brahmasutra* represents *tarka-prasthana* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* represents *smrti-prasthana*. The texts are connected with the commentaries or interpretation. The texts are expository and they are to be commented. The role of interpreter starts here. The commentaries are as important as the texts. In fact, the commentaries do much work than the texts, because sometimes the texts are not only brief, but also elliptical in nature. The interpreter, as a way of his commentary, explicitly analyses what the text says and interprets according to the need and the historical conditions. Thus it is not a mere interpretation but an interpretation mingled

8   Robert R. Ammerman, (ed.) The Classics of Analytic Philosophy, New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd., 1965, Introduction, p.2.

9   B. K. Matilal and J.L. Shaw, (ed.) Analytical Philosophy in Comparative Perspective, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985.

10   S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. ii, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966, p.446.

11   George Thibaut (Tr.) The Vedanta-sutras with the commentary by Sankaracarya, part I, Introduction, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962, p.xiv.

with historicity. It is inevitable for the interpreter or commentator to take into account of his historical conditions and other factors. Thus the text when it is written may have one goal or intention, but the commentator has to interpret the text taking into consideration various factors. Actually speaking these factors which play a dominant role in interpretation, are implicit in interpretation. The interpreter need not wait or search for the historicity to operate on him, while interpreting a text. It is automatic. It is because historicity simply operates on and the interpreter simply exists in it. The interpreter not only understands the texts, but also presents in a different way so that more people can have easy access to it. The text written by the author is not always elaborate and hence cannot pass the message to the reader; whereas the interpreter, who has a better understanding of the text, interprets and presents in a better way than that of the author. Thus the interpreter has a more important role to play than the author does. The text always transcends the author, in other words, the text becomes more meaningful in the hands of the interpreter.

It is through proper understanding and interpretation that one can know the nature of *Brahman*. This is what is implied in the hermeneutical understanding of Advaita. The identity of *Brahman* with the individual self can be known if one knows the correct understanding of the *mahavakyas*. Sankara's way of doing philosophy emerges out of a definite presupposition of Being or *Brahman* which may be taken to be either *a priori* or a matter of inner experiential truth. From this presupposition, he deduces the nature and significance of human existence and the world. The interpreter makes use of *laksana vrtti* for interpreting the scripture. It is the intention of the sentence rather than the logical connection of the words that necessitates implication. The *Vedantaparibhasa* states that the root of implication, however, is the frustration of intention alone, and not that of logical connection (of the words). The interpreter has to transcend all the apparent contradictions while interpreting the scriptures. This has been defined in a characteristic way. There are six marks (*sad linga)* of the purport:

1. the harmony of the initial and concluding passages (*upakrama-upasamhara)*,
2. repetition (*abhyasa*),
3. novelty (*apurvata*),
4. fruitfulness (*phala*),
5. glorification by eulogistic passages or condemnation by deprecatory passages (*arthavada)*, and

6. intelligibility in the light of reasoning (*upapatti*).[12]

Brahman is defined as motionless and at the same time speedier than the mind, in the *Isa Upanisad*. This may appear to be a contradiction in terms, but Sankara says that the two descriptions become perfectly intelligible when understood to apply to *Brahman* in its unconditioned and conditioned aspects.[13]

We use language to refer to empirical things. A word denotes an object or a thing that has some physical existence in the empirical reality. But how are we to understand the word *"Brahman"*? What meaning should we assign to this word? It is neither an object, nor a thing which can be pointed out by means of language. The *Mimamsa* school says that when a word "heaven" is uttered, at first nobody knows the meaning of the word. We guess the meaning of the word from the context in which it occurs. Similarly when we first hear the word, *"Brahman"*, we assume it to have some meaning or other. The meaning of the word becomes clearer when we see the syntactical connection of this word with other familiar words in the Vedic sentences. Etymology and grammar also comes to our aid. The Upanisadic text says: "Reality, knowledge, and infinity is *Brahman*". The *Brahmasutra* says: "Then, therefore, the desire to know *Brahman*." Here we cannot understand the meaning of the word *"Brahman"* unless we take it to mean that it is a real thing, which is to be known because it is the highest end. Etymologically, the word *"Brahman"* is derived from the root which signifies 'unsurpassed greatness', because no other words or topic limits that sense. So we further know that *Brahman* is free from the limitations of space, time and things. How can the ordinary sentences have as their object, *Brahman*, which is said to be eternal? Sankara answers this question by saying that the *Upanisads* do not indicate *Brahman* as the "this" or "that", an object to be known by us. According to the *Upanisads*, *Brahman* is not an object (*avisaya*), because it is the inner self (*pratyagatma*). Vacaspati says that if a man who knows words, meanings, and the principles of testimony, studies the *Upanisads*, then he knows *Brahman* as the Self, on account of the capacity of scriptural testimony to give such knowledge. If the principles of testimony and the meanings of the words are not known, then *Brahman* is not known even though Upanisadic sentences are studied.[14]

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12 TM P. Mahadeven, The Philosophy of Advaita, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers (India), 1976, p.57.

13 Sankara's Commentary on IU, 4.

14 "pr ptaò adhtaved ntasya viditapad rtha-sambandhasya" - Bh mat

Sankara in all his commentaries tries to drive home the point that *Brahman* can never be *described*, but can only be *shown*[15] somehow approximately. At least two methods are suggested for this purpose. (1) the method of *adhyaropa* and *apavada* and (2) the method of *laksana.* In the commentary to the *Bhagavad-gita*, Sankara says: "*Brahman* is not said to be "*sat*" or "*asat*".[16] *Brahman* cannot be described by the word "is" or by the word "is not", for, it is not the object of knowledge in the form of "is" or "is not". An object of knowledge is known through the means of knowledge and is defined as "such and such". But *Brahman* cannot be described by any word, not even by the word, "*sat*" for a word can denote a thing if that object is associated with a genus (*jati*) or an act (*kriya*) or a quality (*guna)* or relation (*sambandha*).[17] For example, cow and horse imply genera, cook and teacher imply acts, white and black imply qualities, wealthy and cattle-owner imply possession. But *Brahman* belongs to no genus and cannot be denoted by such words as "*sat*". Being devoid of attributes, it possesses no qualities. If it were possessed of qualities, then it could be denoted by a word, implying a quality. Being actionless, it cannot be indicated by a word implying an act. It is not related to anything else; for it is one. It is one without a second. It is no object (of any sense). It is the very Self. Therefore, it is but right to say that it cannot be denoted by any word at all. The *Taittiriya Upanisad* says: "Whence (*i.e.* away from *Brahman*, unable to approach *Brahman*), all words along with the mind return."[18]

Since *Brahman* is beyond everything, it cannot be described by words. It is through superimposition (*adhyaropa)* and the subsequent negation of it (*apavada*), *Brahman* is elucidated in the texts. The text says, for example, "*Brahman* has hands, legs, eyes, heads, faces, and ears on all sides; encompassing all, it stands",[19] and immediately this is rejected. If *Brahman* is described as "it moves", then immediately it is negated in the very next sentence. For example, the *Isa Upanisad* says, "That moves, That does not move; That is far off, That is very near; That is inside all, and That is outside all."[20] Sankara explains that sentences such as "though it has no eyes and ears, it sees and hears," are to be understood in the way in which

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15   Wittgenstein in the Tractatus makes the distinction between "saying" and "showing". According to him, there are important things (propositions of logic, moral and aesthetic values, meaning of life, etc) which, although cannot be said, can be shown.

16   BG, xiii, 12.

17   Naiskarmyasiddhi, III, 103.

18   TU, II, iv, i.

19   BG, xiii, 13.

20   IU, 5.

sentences such as, "the blind one saw the gem" are to be understood. Because *Brahman* is devoid of the senses, it is unattached, devoid of all attachments. Words used for describing *Brahman* are not to be understood univocally; the usual mode of linguistic expression will not help us in understanding the ultimate reality.

By the method of *laksana*, *Brahman* is defined both by *tatastha- laksana* as well as *svarupa-laksana.* The definition of *Brahman* from the *tatastha- laksana* is from the relative standpoint and the definition by *svarupa- laksana* is from the absolute standpoint. In the definition, *Brahman* is *satyam, jnanam* and *anantam*, the words are used not in the qualifying sense. Here words, are used in the secondary sense. The word, "*satyam*" differentiates *Brahman* from things unreal (*anrta*), the word, "*jnanam*" from non-intelligent things (*jada*), and the word, "*anantam*" from finite things (*paricchinna*). So the text conveys the knowledge of *Brahman* only indirectly by negating the unreal, non-intelligent and the limited from it. These words which are in co-ordinate relation cannot convey the intended meaning if each of them is construed in the primary sense. Sankara's commentary on the *Taittiriya Upanisad* says:

The sentence *satyam jnanam anantam brahma---Brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinite, is meant as a definition of *Brahman.* For the three words beginning with *satya* are meant to distinguish *Brahman*, which is substantive. And from the fact that *Brahman* is the thing intended to be known, it follows that *Brahman* is the substantive. Since *Brahman* is sought to be represented as the chief object of knowledge, the knowable must be the substantive. And just because (*Brahman* and *satya* etc.) are related as the substantive and its attributives, the words beginning with *satya* have the same case ending, and they stand in opposition.

Thus, Sankara makes it clear that the three words beginning with *satyam* should not be understood in terms of substantive-attribute relation (*visheSha-viśeShya*).

Analysis of sentences in Indian tradition is unique. Generally sentences are classified into: (1) those which signify a relational meaning (*samsargavagahi*) and (2) those which signify a non-relational meaning (*samsarganavagahi* or *akhaĬ‾ rthaka*). A sentence like "Rose is red" conveys substantive-adjective relation (*viśeṣya-viśeṣaṇa-sambandha*). A sentence expresses a relation (*samsarga*) between a substantive and an adjective. The import of the sentence, "The cow exists" (*gau asti*), is characterised by existence" (*astitvavan gau*). Advaitins are of the view that sentences which signify a non-relational meaning like propositions expressing true identity, which lie outside a definition or description explain the

importance of a unique relation between language and *Brahman*. According to Sankara, judgments of identity like, "That thou art" and "I am *Brahman*" should be understood in the same way as we understand the non-relational statements like "This is that Devadatta". Here the substrate alone in "this" and "that" is taken to be the purport; part of the meaning of the word "this" and "that", which is Devadatta, alone is taken as the purport of the expression and the sense of place and time is relinquished. Similarly in the text, "*tat tvam asi*", the individual consciousness is identified with universal consciousness. The *mahavakyas* convey unitary impartite sense (*akhaārtha bodhaka*) free from all distinctions.

In his analysis, Sankara adopts the referential model of meaning in a special way. For example, the sentence "This pot is blue" refers to a particular pot, which is blue in colour. The meaning of the sentence thus implies a reference. For all practical purpose, according to Sankara, words must be related to some objective referents. This makes language possible. What is important is that Sankara does not stop with this. He uses the word "reference " in a broader sense of the term. He says that a sentence like "This cow is white" also indirectly refers to *Brahman*. According to Advaita, all perceptual knowledge gives us the knowledge of pure being or existence (*sanmatram*). Every object, whatever it may be, is cognized as existent and not as non-existent. The existent (*sat*) which is cognized in perception is *Brahman*. The real (*satya*) is the existent (*sat*) and the existent alone is the real. This means that when we say on the basis of perception that a pot is existent, what is existent is *Brahman* alone, and it is the existence of *Brahman* that is apprehended in every act of perception.[21] It is being or *sat* which comes to be endowed with various characteristics, general as well as specific, in our day to day experience. If we abstract all the characteristics one after the other what remains at the end is the *sat*. This being or *sat* which is uniformly present in all the objects of cognition is no other than *Brahman*.[22] According to Advaita, five characteristics are discernible in every object of experience: (1) existence (*asti*), manifestation (*bhati*) (3) lovability (*priyam*), name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*). Of these, the last two differ from object to object. They are stuff of the world and are unreal. The first three constitute the essential nature of *Brahman*, which is existence-intelligence-bliss. We speak of the elements and the elements as existing (*asti*) as manifest (*bhati*) and as being attractive (*priyam*). These characteristics which are common to all

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21   R. Balasubramainan, Some Problems in the Epistemology and Metaphysics of Ramanuja, Madras: University of Madras, 1978, p.30.

22   R. Balasubramainan, The Voice of Sankara, vol.x,3-4. pp.242-3.

products really belong to *Brahman*. The words, which denote objects like pot etc., which are only illusory, have their purport in *Brahman*-Atman, which is the substratum. So every word that we use for the purpose of denoting some object or other has its purport only in *Brahman*, though superficially speaking, we may say that each word signifies this or that object.

According to the Advaitins, the *Brahmana* part of the *Veda* is divided into: (1) *vidhi*, (2) *arthavada* and (3) *vedanta-vakyas*. The *arthavadas* are divided into three kinds: *guna vada, anuvada* and *bhūtārthavāda*. A *guna vada* is a sentence, which contradicts what is known from the other *pramanas*. For example, the sentence, "The sacrificial post is the sun" is a *gunavada*. An *anuvada* is something already known through other *pramanas* as *e.g.,* "Fire is the antidote for cold". A *bhūtārthavāda* states something, which is neither contradicted, nor confirmed by other *pramanas* eg., "Indra raised his weapon against Vrtra". The Mimamsakas argue that the purport of the *Vedas* lies in action. The sentences of the *Veda* are classified into two groups--those which are injunctive (*vidhi-vakyas*) and those which are informative about the existent object (*siddharthabodhaka-vakyas*). While the sentences of the former group enjoin some action to be performed, those of the latter group convey the knowledge of objects already exist. The Prabhakaras maintain that only injunctive sentences of the *Veda* have validity and informative sentences which occur in the *Veda* such as "*satyam jnanam anantam brahma*" which describe the nature of *Brahman* are not valid on their own, since they are not injunctive. But these texts form part of the *Veda* and hence cannot be ignored either. They have to be accommodated by making them subsidiary to the injunctive texts, which are principal. The *arthavadas* in order to be valid, must be construed as subsidiary to the injunctive texts (*vidhivakya*). A secular sentence like, "There are fruits (in the tress) on the river bank" which is existential has to depend on another *pramana* or means of valid knowledge for what it conveys and hence has no validity. If a sentence is injunctive, what it enjoins cannot be within the range of another *pramana*; and hence it will have independent validity. Applying the same principle to the *Sruti* texts, which are existential, the Mimamsakas argue that they should be treated as injunctive or construed with injunctive texts for preserving their independent validity. Thus for the Mimamsakas, all *arthavadas* are not authoritative in themselves and they serve as auxiliaries to injunctive statements (*vidhi-vakyas*). This view is not acceptable to the Advaitins for two reasons: (i) It should be noted that dependence on another *pramana* is not due to a sentence being existential, because there is such dependence even in the

injunctive sentence like "Bring a cow" The reason for dependence on another *pramana* is elsewhere. A sentence uttered by a human being will have to depend on another *pramana* for what it conveys, of whether it is existential or injunctive. Only sentences of human origin have this dependent nature. In the case of *Sruti* texts like, "That thou art", there is no difficulty since they are *apauruseya.* If the Mimamsakas say that the *arthavadas* do not have any independent validity (because according to them they are dependent on another *pramana*), and hence should be treated as subsidiary to injunctive texts, then the injunctive texts (*vidhi vakyas*) can also be rejected on the same basis. (2) Knowledge has intrinsic validity (*svta pramanya*) both in respect of its origin (*utpattau*) and ascertainment (*jnaptau*). First of all, the very conditions under which it arise account for its validity. Secondly, even as it arises, it is believed to be valid without requiring verification by some other knowledge. It means that all knowledge is presumably valid, whatever be the *pramana* from which it arises. If so, then the Mimamsakas' contention that all informative sentences which occur in the *Veda* are not valid on their own and hence must be construed as subsidiary to injunctive texts is not correct. All sentences are meaningful and valid by themselves and need not be construed to other sentences. Thus the Advaitins argue that all the *vedanta-vakyas* are purportful because the identity of *Brahman* and the individual self is realised from them. These sentences are not subsidiaries to any ritualistic actions as conceived by the Mimamsakas. When the identity is realised, then there is no necessity for us to practice the ritualistic actions.

Sankara says that *anuvadas* and *gunadavadas* are not *pramanas* because a *pramana* according to him, should be capable of giving valid knowledge. But neither *anuvadas* nor *gunavadas* are capable of giving valid knowledge and hence are not *pramanas*. Sankara argues that the *bhūtārthavāda* are *pramanas* because they are capable of giving both valid and uncontradicted knowledge. For example, the *arathavada* sentence like, "Indra became a wolf and killed Medh tithi, the son of Kanva" gives valid knowledge and is independently authoritative. From this passage we learn that gods such as Indra are embodied persons, who are able to assume whatever form they like by virtue of their wondrous power.[23]

The *vedanta vakyas* are classified into: (1) those sentences which are concerned with the ascertainment of the nature of the supreme Self and (2) those sentences which are concerned with teaching the identity of the supreme Self and the individual Self. The first kind of sentences are divided into (a) essential (*svarupa*)

23   BSSB, I, iii, 33.

non-relational definitions of *Brahman*, and (b) accidental (*tatastha*) definitions of *Brahman* based on some false attribution. The second kind of sentences are further divided into four types: (i) that declaring the "Thou" to be identical with *Brahman* (*tat tvam asi*),[24] (ii) that declaring the "I" to be *Brahman* (*aham brahmasmi*),[25] (iii) that which proclaims the identity of "Self" and *Brahman* (*ayam atma brahma*)[26] and (iv) that which declares that Consciousness is *Brahman* (*prajnanam brahma*).[27] The first *mahavakya, prajnanam brahma* is a definition (*laksanavakya*), the second one, *ayam atma brahma* is an expression of experience (*anubhavavakya*) and third one, *tat tvam asi*, is a sentence of instruction (*upadesavakya*) and the fourth one, *aham brahmasmi* is a sentence of practice (*anusandhanavakya*) free from all distinctions.

The *mahavakyas* come under the category of coordinate relation or *samanadhikaranya*. It speaks of the grammatical coordinate relation that exists between words. It is the application to one thing, of several words having the same case, for the application of each of which there is different reason.[28] In the *samanadhikaranya*,

1. the words used are in the same case,
2. they are not synonyms,
3. they refer to the one and the same entity and
4. there is a reason for the use of each word.

There are four types of *samanadhikaranya*

1. Adhyasa samanadhikaranya
2. apavAde samanadhikaranya
3. visesana-visesya samanadhikaranya and
4. aikya samanadhikaran*ya.*

1. *Adhyasa samanadhikaranya* is of two kinds: the *mukhya* and *Bādhāyām.* In the former, the objects denoted by the words of a sentence will have equal ontological status, will be identical in nature, and will not be really different from each other. For example, when we say, "*ghatakasa mahakasa eva*" (The pot-ether is but the great-ether) the words *ghatakasa* and *mahakasa* are in

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24   CU, VI, viii, 7.

25   BU, I, iv, 10.

26   MAU, 2.

27   AU, III,i, 3.

28   George Thibaut (Tr.) The Vedanta-sutras with the commentary of Ramanuja, p.79, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962, p.xiv.

mukhya samanadhikaraya. The pot-enclosed ether and the ether outside it have the same ontological status, *i.e,* both are empirically real. Also both of them have the same nature and are not different from each other.

If the words of a sentence, which have the same case-ending, denote objects which have different ontological status, and if they purport to convey only one idea, then they are in *badhayam samanadhikaranya* . For example, when we say, "*ayam sthanu purusa* (This post is a man), the objects denoted by the words "*sthanu*" and *purusa*" have different ontological status. Since what exists really is a man and not a post, "man" is empirically real, whereas "post" is apparently real. A person due to distance and other factors, first of all perceives a man as a post, but subsequently corrects the mistake when he knows that the object seen by him is not a post, but a man, and utters: "The post is a man." It is absurd to say on the basis of a superficial reading of the sentence that he identifies the post and the man. What he intends to convey by this sentence is that the object which he cognized as a post is, indeed, a man. Here, the subsequent cognition of the object as a man sublates the earlier cognition of it as a post; and it does not take place without cancelling the earlier cognition, which is erroneous. The object referred to by the sentence is only one; and the sentence achieves its objective through the sublation of one cognition by another cognition. The *mahavakya*, "I am *Brahman*" (*aham brahmasmi*), can be interpreted in the same way in which the sentence "This post is a man" has been interpreted. When a person realises that he is *Brahman* as a result of the hearing of the *Sruti* text, the right cognition which he has attained sublated the wrong cognition he had earlier, *i,e.,* cognition such as "I am a man" "I am blind" etc. Thus the *mahavakya* (*aham brahmasmi*) can be interpreted by using the *badhayam samanadhikaranya.*

2. *Adhyasa samanadhikaranya*: This is a co-ordinate relation involving error and it is of two kinds: *dosakrtam* and *adosakrtam*. In the case of *adosakrtam*, a rope is mistaken for a snake. Due to the absence of light, a rope is perceived as a snake. In the case of *adosakrtam*, the *adhyasa* or superimposition is from that of *upasana* enjoined by scripture. In meditation, (*upasana*) one object is cognized as another as enjoined by the scripture. For example, the *Upanisad* says: This (earth) is verily the *Ṛc*, the fire is the *Sāman*". Here the *Ṛc* should be viewed as the earth and the *Saman* as fire for the purpose of

meditation on the authority of scripture. Unlike the rope-snake example, where a person, not knowing the object in front as a rope, cognizes it as a snake, here the mediator knowing the *Ṛc*, as what it is nevertheless cognizes it as the earth not because of ignorance but because of scriptural injunction. So in the case of *dosakrtam*, it is *adhyasa* caused by ignorance and in the case of *adosakrtam* it is *adhyasa* which one deliberately practices due to scriptural injunction.

Both these *adhyasa* cannot be used to interpret the *mahavakya*, because they do not allow any kind of superimposition in them.

3. *Visesana-visesya samanadhikaranya*: This is a co-ordinate relation involving substance-attributes, for example, in the sentence, "*nilamutpalam*" the two words, "*nilam*" and "*utpalam*" convey different meanings--the former signifies a colour characterised by the quality of blueness (*nilatva*) while the latter, a substance possessing the property of lotus ness (*utpalatva*). The relation between the two words is as *visesana* and *visesya, i.e.,* as qualification and the qualified. This type of *samanadhikaranya* cannot be used to interpret the *mahavakya* like "*tat tvam asi*" because the words "*tat*' and "*tvam*" do not involve any *visesana* and *visesya* relation.

4. *Aikya-samanadhikaranya*: This is a co-ordinate relation involving identity. The statement, "This is that Devadatta" refers to the identity (*aikya*) of the individual in spite of the differences in respect of time and place. Similarly, the *mahavakya* "*tat tvam asi*" speaks about the identity of the individual self with the supreme Self.

It is clear that from the above discussion that Indian philosophy, especially, Advaita has adopted the hermeneutic method with a special distinction. For the Advaitins, language has two dimensions. Though language is analysed for the sake of explaining the empirical facts and experiences, language is also used to say something about the nature of *Brahman* directly. It is true that language has its limitations and cannot communicate the nature of *Brahman*. But it is only though language at least something can be said of *Brahman*. Prof. K. Satchidananda Murty aptly says: "While no description is possible of *Brahman*, the task of the Vedanta is to teach about it, and so logically speaking it is an impropriety; but only in this way can the Vedanta emphasize the mystery of *Brahman*, which eludes all objective language; yet it can be dealt with only in that way if *Brahman* has to be talked

about intelligibly".[29] This aspect of Indian philosophy is defined as the creativity by Prof. H.G. Coward: "The ability of language to deal with ordinary human things and yet at the same time to be metaphysically grounded is... evidenced in the distinctive Indian notion of creativity... Indian approach shows itself to be more encompassing and insightful than the bifurcated and too narrow view of many of the western schools".[30] Similarly, J. G. Arapura also while commenting on the nature of the mystery of language, says that in the tradition of Vedanta, what language was plugged into was consciousness *per se* rather than understanding of man. "Language is the means by which we can plunge into the depth of our own consciousness".[31]

29   K. Satchidananda Murty, Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedanta, Waltair: Andhra University, 1961, p. 57.

30   H.G. Coward, Sphota Theory of Language, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

31   J.G. Arapura, Hermeneutical Essays on Vedanta Topics, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p.161.