

Review Article

Gaudapadacharya “Asparsa Yoga” for Attaining “No Mind”: A Historical Method of Advaita Vedanta for Teaching “Human Liberation” in a Profound Way

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the two verses from the 3rd chapter known as “*Advaita Prakaranam*” (section of nonduality) of text called “*Mandukya Karika*” written by the author Gaudapada. At the beginning of the text Gaudapada tells, the problems which human beings have in the world (Samsara) are due to the perception of duality (subject-object duality). He says, the duality causes Samsara (problems in the worldly life) and nonduality (one without a second) is the freedom. Hence, “Advaita” (nonduality) is the freedom (*Moksha*) and duality (*Dvaitam*) is “Samsara” (Worldly troubles or bondage). According to Shankara’s commentary on Gaudapada’s texts, “no-mind” can be attained by constant practice of discrimination between the real and the unreal (repeated discrimination), all based upon reasoning. Gaudapada says “*Amanibhava*” (no-mind) means managing the mind or spiritualizing the mind. It means when a person realizes the truth about oneself as the “Existence, consciousness, Bliss” (The Absolute or Brahman) then, in the mind, there will be no more desiring or reaching out or grasping. When the mind finds nothing out there to grasp then it becomes a “nongrasping mind” (*Agraham*) that is called a “no-mind” state. This “no mind” state is referred to “freedom or liberation” from worldly suffering according to Advaita Vedanta Philosophy. This state of complete identity with nondual Brahman, arrived at as a result of discrimination and negation of phenomena, is the Vedantic conception of Samadhi (which is quite different from any mystical state described as Samadhi in the Yoga system).

KEYWORDS: Advaita, Asparsa yoga, Brahman, Gaudapada, Mandukyakarika, no mind, Shankara, Vedanta

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INTRODUCTION

If we look at our own experience, the subject-object duality is the very basis of our experience of the world. I am a limited being separate from the rest of the world, this is the duality which a natural feeling of all sentient beings. “I am the experiencer and all the world of objects is separate from me” is called subject-object duality. This duality is at the root of “Samsara” (bondage or worldly suffering).^[1]

“*Mano Drisyam Idamdvaitam yatkinchit sacharacharam, manasohy amanibhavedvaitam nivopalabhyathe.*”

This duality (subject and object) is the projection of the mind or experienced by the mind (Gaudapada’s Mandukyakarika, 3.31).^[1] Anything in the world moving and unmoving, living and nonliving is a duality which is experienced by the mind. When the mind becomes

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“no mind” duality is no longer cognized. The truth is that the mind is identical with Atman. Mind is Atman. It is only through ignorance that we separate the mind from Atman. Hence, this understanding suggests that duality is linked to the functioning of the mind, it means where there is “mind” there is a duality where there is “no-mind” there is nonduality.

THREE STATES OF EXPERIENCES

In the waking world, we experience the subject-object duality and we also experience the problems, likings, disliking that means chasing for the objects which we like, and running away from objects what we afraid of to avoid it, all this gives rise to “the struggle of life” is traditionally called as “*Samsara*.” Every person experiences the constant change, aging, and decay, disease and death in this waking world, which is all part of the *Samsara* and bondage.^[2]

Similarly, in our dream experience, we have a duality of subject and object, a person can have good dreams and bad dreams, but in all kinds of dreams, there is subject-object duality. While in dreams a person’s true experience is like “I am experiencing something” though later on when he wakes up from a dream and realizes that all is in the mind. However, during dreams, one cannot realize this truth, so the duality has existed in the dreams and so “*Samsara*” (worldly suffering) is also there in the dreams.

In deep sleep, when we completely fall asleep where we are not aware of the world, do not dream the dreams in the mind; we are not even aware of ourselves as sleeping. In this state, we do not experience “*Samsara*” that is why when a person is in greatest problems of the world like sick or dying and terrible condition yet when that person goes into deep sleep has no problems. Hence, *Samsara* is not there in deep sleep. It is to be noticed, in deep sleep duality is also not experienced. It means the subject-object experience is not experienced. Therefore, when duality is not experienced suffering or *Samsara* is also not experienced. Hence, Gaudapada points out that duality and *Samsara* go together, whereas nonduality, where there is no subject-object experience, is the state of freedom from “*Samsara*.”^[3]

Does it mean that we fall asleep all the time? It does not seem to be a solution, because the mind of a man, who has not known the Truth or Self, becomes absorbed in *Avidya* at the time of deep sleep. Although it is not a solution, in order to wipe out the experience of worldly sufferings many people take drinks, drugs, etc., and this keeps the mind in a in a trans state for a while.

This is not a suggested route; Gaudapada says duality is also there in deep sleep in a seed form (*Bhija Avastha*).^[4] After all deep sleep, we wake, and again *Samsara* comes back with the same body, same physical problems, financial problems, and relationship issues, etc. This is like a computer being switched off and when it switches on all the data will appear again. Therefore, the deep sleep is not a permanent solution.

Shankara in his introduction to *Mandukyakarika* says, “*Rogarthasya Roga Nivruthi Evaswasthata*.”^[5] Just as for a sick person curing the disease is the attainment of health because health is his natural condition. Similarly, the cessation of duality is the attainment of nonduality as it is a natural condition for a human being.

This is illustrated by Shankara with a classic example of Vedanta “the rope appears as the snake in semi darkness.” The snake is unreal when we try to see it as separated from the rope. However, when the real nature of the rope is known then it is realized that the snake, which appeared, is really identical with the rope. The substratum (*Adhishthana*) is the same as that which is superimposed (*Aropita*) upon it. One realizes that the snake is nothing other than the rope. In a sense the snake merges back into the rope in our knowledge. In reality, there was no snake, it was a misperception. In the same way, when nonduality is misperceived as duality (self and world) “*Samsara*” (worldly suffering) is there when oneself realizes the nonduality then instantly *Samsara* disappears.^[5]

PATANJALI YOGA APPROACH TO “NO-MIND”

Every experience in the life of a person from birth to death is in the mind. Without mind no experience is possible. Although the entire world seems to be outside of us in actuality, the entire phenomena of the world are experienced in the mind with the help of sense organs. This is confirmed by neuroscience today, what we are seeing with our physical eyes does not enter into eyes except reflected light of those objects. Later this sensory information is converted to electrical impulses. Then, neurochemicals in the brain generate little electricity at the synapses that is transmitted from the optic nerve to some centers of the brain. When information reaches the brain, there no objects of the world, not even image or light is perceived, but the information is in the form of a tiny burst of electricity. Moreover, somehow (Neuroscientists also don’t know) from that little bit of electricity constituted back into the living experience of objects in our mind. This is agreed upon by the modern science today without any dispute.^[6]

Therefore, all the objects we see in the world are actually in our minds. An object is seeing means in reality it

is a modification (*Vruthi*) of the mind.^[7] Hence, all of “Samsara” including most lovable and hatred, the best of experiences and most miserable of experiences are in the mind. Therefore, a very interesting and worthwhile point to notice from this understanding is; the quality of our experience depends on the mind not really on the world outside. Hence, our natural way of trying to change the things in the world for better experiences (happiness) is now understood as a mistake. A wiser person approach would be to change the whole perception of things. Therefore, it is not that worldly troubles make the mind restless, but it is just opposite, one has restless mind hence experience worldly troubles.^[7] A person with a peaceful mind in the same situation would experience very less suffering comparatively with a person of restless mind. Hence, a good deal of our contribution is our minds. This is evident in today’s one of the pain management therapies, which is “talk therapy” or “counseling” for pain management. The actual pain management with medicines is <30%, is accepted by medical doctors today. This is because the mental makeup or expectation of the pain and uneasiness is greater than the actual pain that accounts for more suffering than actual physical pain. Doctors are saying that 70%–80% of the suffering is contributed by minds; only 20%–30% is actual physical pain which can be managed to some extent by medicines.^[8]

Thus, when the mind becomes “no mind” Samsara (all human suffering) is wiped out. In Yoga, it is referred to as “Samadhi” which means in meditation when all the modifications of the mind settled down then the world will not be perceived.^[9] The practicality of this concept is very much correlated with the individual experience.

Hence, a good deal of “Samsara” is in the mind, if the mind can be made into “no mind” then no more worldly suffering exists. The Yogis solution to attain “no mind” is “*Chitha Vruthi Nirodhaha*” which means calm down the mind, when the mind is still (Samadhi) no “Samsara” is experienced. Patanjali Yoga system has prescribed eight-limbed Yoga practices for attaining “no mind” state which is; *Yama* (abstinences), *Niyama* (observance), *Asana* (yoga postures), *Pranayama* (breath control), *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dhyana* (Meditation) and *Samadhi* (Absorption of the mind).^[10]

“ASPARSA YOGA” BY GAUDAPADA TO ATTAIN “NO-MIND”

Gaudapada says “*Amanibhava*” (no mind) means managing the mind or spiritualizing the mind. Gaudapada says in his *Mandukyakarika* (3.32.), when a person realizes the truth about oneself as the “existence,

Consciousness, bliss” (Brahman) then in the mind there will be no more desiring or reaching out or grasping. When the mind finds nothing out there to grasp then it becomes a “nongrasping mind” (*Agraham*) that is called a “no-mind” state. This is known as “freedom.”^[4,7] The *Jnanis* knowing this truth do not care for the control of the mind and this can be seen in the lives of Sankaracharya and Ramana Maharshi who did not follow any mind control practices after realization of the truth to live in the world. For, the mind, as such, does not exist for them. One, who realizes mind as Brahman, finds spontaneously, peace, fearlessness. Duality is seen on account of the activity of the mind. However, the *Jnani* sees the identity of the mind and Brahman. Therefore, duality does not exist for him. Hence, *Jnani* does not experience any fear, misery. Therefore, peace, fearlessness, etc., in his case is natural. The difference between intellectual understanding is: intellectual understanding is not adequate for self-realization, but it requires experiential knowledge of the truth and as per Advaitic doctrine; upon continuous reflection on the subject taught by the masters in the mind with great reverence and then by the grace this turned out to be realization of the truth about one’s own self by “*Brahmakara Vrithi*.”

Gaudapada says with the help of discrimination power (*Viveka*) one can attain a “no-mind” state. The “discrimination” or “discerning” is a peculiar method in nonduality, which is philosophical separation done in Vedanta for the realization of the truth.^[5]

The spectacle of the ever-changing world in life is not permanent; it means all experienced objects are transient. In the midst of this, one can able to discern the eternal by discrimination power (*Viveka*) in understanding and can recognize the eternal consciousness, existence, and bliss (Absolute truth or Brahman). Having separated in understanding that the mind becomes absorbed in the nondual reality.^[7]

For everyone, there are three kinds of experiences in life; waking experience, dream experience, and deep sleep experience. The question is who am I? In all these experiences, am I the person who is experiencing the waking world? Am I the person who is experiencing dreams of sleeping? Am I the one who knows nothingness in the deep sleep?^[11]

Mandukya Upanishad says, you (“I”) are the one consciousness in which the arouser and the waking world appears, in which the dreamer and the dream world appears, in which deep sleeper and blank state experienced.^[1] This can be understood by analyzing the dream experience, in dreams when we fall asleep,

our minds construct a world and a person who will experience the world of objects. It is only when a person wakes up from the world realizes that it was a dream, all of it I saw, all the places I went to, all the time that passed, all the events that happen, and even myself in the dream with the body is all is dreamt by the mind. Here, the mind alone became the subject and the object.

In the same way, during waking state, consciousness alone appears as the waking experiencer (subject) and the world of things (object). This “consciousness” is apart from three states of mind called waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Hence, it is also called “fourth” (*turiyam*) in Mandukya Upanishad. In reality, “consciousness” is underlying in all three states.

This separation is called “*Atma Anatma Viveka*” (discrimination between self and nonself). The consciousness is neither born nor die, it is the person who born in waking world dies while sleeping, the body born grows, age and dies, and things are created and destroyed. Hence, things in the dreams or the waking world are noneternal or transient who are subject to birth and death but consciousness is not subject to birth and death. *Atma* (self) is “*Nityam*” (eternal) and “*Anatma*” (nonself) is “*Anityam*” (noneternal). “*Atma*” (Self) is “*Nirvikara*” (unchanging) and “*Anatma*” (nonself) is “*Savikara*” (Changes). The deeper point to be noticed is, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states are not different from consciousness, although they seem to be, as dreamer and dream world cannot exist without the dreamer’s mind. The “pure consciousness” is the reality and the arouser, dreamer, and deep sleeper are appearances, just as the person in the dream is an appearance in the mind. Hence, “*Atma*” (self) is “*Satyam*” (the truth) and “*Anatma*” is “*Mithya*” (illusion or false).^[12]

Shankara in his invocatory verses on commentary to Mandukya Upanishad says “*Mayasankyaturiyam.*” It means the true self is called “fourth” (*turiyam*) when you count through “*Maya*” (illusion or false perception), but truly speaking pure consciousness is the one in which those three states are appearances.^[13]

Putting all together, if “*Anatma*” (nonself) is unreal then can we count it? In general, it is not possible to count the false along with the truth; it means two things cannot be counted together. It is like, ornaments made of gold like a bracelet, ring, and bangles are three in number and when we try to add the gold as the fourth one along with the ornaments then it is a mistake because gold is the one reality and all other ornaments are appearances of that reality. Hence, one cannot count three ornaments along with gold because it is the reality of those three

ornaments. Therefore, if one cannot count arouser, dreamer, and deep sleeper and their universes along with the “*Turiyam*” (the fourth one) then called “*Ekameva Advitiyam*” it means “the one without a second” which is famously known as “*Advaita*” (without a second). The consciousness is the “*Advaita*” when this is realized then it leads to “*Amanastham Tadayati*” the mind becomes “no mind” (without desires).^[12] Mind still works, the world can be seen and it can experience the world and it can do everything but with the knowledge that no separate reality out there apart from his consciousness which he has to chase or get terrified, so he attains the fearlessness (enlightenment). The aim of the dualistic statements of the *Sruti (Vedas)* is to establish ultimately the identity of *Jiva* and Brahman. The Upanishads accept the empirical view of the world as it appears and explain it by saying that Brahman, who is both the material and efficient cause of the universe, created the world with all its beings and then entered into all as the living self. This explanation establishes the unity of Brahman and *Jiva* (individual sense of being), the apparent difference being ascribed to ignorance. The import of the *Sruti (Vedas)* is this: the nondual Brahman alone exists; it is birth less, causeless, and changeless. If one sees multiplicity that is also Brahman. The experience of multiplicity in the nondual Brahman is due to *Avidya*.^[9]

When one is rooted in the knowledge of the Self that I am the truth then he realizes this entire world is shining forth of the self. The good and the bad is none other than the self. It means the self is the pure consciousness and the entire world is an appearance in pure consciousness. The important difference between yogic approach and Vedantic approach that the first approach seeks to free oneself by erasing “*Samsara*” (worldly suffering) it is like switching off the movie to overcome horror in the movie, but the latter approach is to recognize what is the world is, like to recognize the movie as it is but not to imagine the movie as reality and suffer from its horror. This recognition gives freedom to oneself from worldly suffering.

In dream there is the experience of the separate existence of the perceiver, the object of perception and the act of perceiving. However, after waking it is known that these three-fold experiences to be nothing but the mind appearing as above three. The idea that the dream experiences are different from the mind is due to the ignorance which exists in the dream state. The mind is the substratum of the dream experiences. There is no doubt that the mind which is in fact nondual appears as duality in dream as three things; in same manner that which is nondual Brahman, appears as duality in the waking state.

Truly speaking, the snake is identical with the rope. In like manner, the mind which is nondual as *Atman* appears undoubtedly in dual forms in dreams. Verily in dream, such objects of perception as elephants, etc., or their perceivers such as eyes, etc., have no existence independently of consciousness (mind). Similar is the case in the waking state as well. For (consciousness) mind, which is the highest reality, is common to both.

Therefore, the mind of a *Jnani* (*knower of truth*) which is disciplined by discrimination is not so withdrawn from the world, that is to say, *Jnani* does not go back to the seed state of darkness after self-realization. Thus, it is made the distinction between the mind in deep sleep and that of a *Jnanis* mind. When the mind becomes free from ideas of the perceiver and the perceived, the duality caused by ignorance becomes one with the Supreme and the nondual Brahman.^[9]

REASON FOR NAMING “ASPARSA YOGA” (YOGA OF NO CONTACT)

The Brahman (pure consciousness or self) and the world are not enemies; the real (pure consciousness) and false (appearance of names and forms in the consciousness) are not enemies. What is the enemy of falsity (believing and asserting the existence to the names and forms) is the knowledge (realization of true existence). The only reality in the pots, jars, plates, etc., (made of clay) is the clay. The names and forms, on account of their changeability and negatability, are unreal. Similarly, the only reality in this universe is *Atman*; all other objects which are mere acts of mind, being changeable and negatable, are unreal. Therefore, the duality is perceived when the mind acts and it vanishes when the mind ceases to act; that is to say, when the (activity, i.e. the *Vrittis* of the) mind is withdrawn unto itself by the knowledge got through discrimination, like the disappearance of the snake in the rope. Hence, on account of the disappearance of duality, it is established that duality is unreal or illusory. That which was superimposed upon the rope is identical with the substratum. Only the idea of the existence of the snake apart from the rope is illusion. Similarly, all attributes of *Atman*, such as materiality or immateriality, etc., are, in reality, identical with *Atman*. To concede any separate existence to the attributes independent of *Atman* is illusion. *Atman*, the nondual, changeless and causeless reality, alone exists. All that exists is *Atman*. Even that which is imagined as means for the realization of *Atman* is not separate from the *Atman*. Hence, knowledge of reality is the enemy of falsity, but reality as such is not the enemy of falsity. Hence, the world here and now, in reality, is Brahman (pure consciousness or absolute)

and in which the world and its objects appears and disappears without any contradiction. It is because of the “Brahman” (pure consciousness) the world is appearing and because of its experience of the world is possible. Hence, the knowledge of the “Brahman” is the end of the “worldly suffering” or transcendence of all worldly miseries, is known as “*Brahma Jnana*” (knowledge about the truth).^[14] There is no real contact between the “Brahman” and “Samsara;” hence, no actual enmity is possible. Therefore, “Samsara” cannot disturb or harm the “Brahman” (pure consciousness or self) as like all water in the mirage cannot wet single grain of sand in the desert.^[3] Hence, the false world cannot harm the real self because there is no point of contact between reality and falsity. If two things exist then only there is a question of contact, but when it only seems to exist then not possible to have contact. There is only one reality that appears as the self and the world. (World seen as it is unreal but after realizing the substratum of it, identity of “self” and “world” established) like in a classic example of pot and clay, the constituent of the pot is clay and which is the material cause but after examination of the pot, one finds the top to bottom inside out it is all clay there is nothing called pot because every bit of it is clay and no such separate thing as pot. Finally, one realizes, clay alone is real, the pot is the name and a form with a particular use (“*Nama Rupa Vyavahara*”). It is a change in paradigm and it is a change in understanding and as a result, the shift takes place internally that there are no two things that exist in reality, like self and the world, gold and ornaments, and pot and clay.^[15] Therefore, a verse in “*Asparsa Yoga*” says the self (Brahman) is “*Asparsa*” (no contact) with the appearance of the world.^[14]

CONCLUSION

The problem of Samsara (bondage) and liberation (*Moksha*) is the problem of duality (*Dvaita*) and nonduality (*Advaita*). This is further reduced to “mind” and “no mind” (*Amanibhava*). Because of the movement of the mind, one thinks that there is a world of duality which leads to bondage and suffering. As a result, “no-mind” is the key which can be attained, “Yogi” says by “*Samadhi*” (Absolute calmness of the mind) which means shutting down the world; don’t get involved in the world. Another approach to “no mind” is given by Gaudapada in *Mandukyakarika* where he says “*AtmaSatyanubodhena*” by “*Viveka*” (Discrimination) of the self (*Atma*) and not-self (*Anatma*) means by seeing (realization) that self is eternal and not-self is not eternal and by seeing the self is unchanging and the not-self is changing and by seeing the self is real and not-self is appearance finally

one can realize that the self alone truly exists (Advaita or nonduality) and recognition of this truth one can attain “no mind” (*Amanibhava*). Nonduality is not meant for wiping out activities of oneself in the world or destroying life. Thus, Advaita (nonduality) guide to freeing from sense of individual limited being into limitless as a result transcending from suffering and bondages. Advaita tells that the entire vastness of time and space is nothing other than the self which is infinite consciousness in which the entire universe appears. Therefore, the essential teaching of the Vedanta “*Brahma Satyam Jagath Mithya Jiva Brahmiva naparaha*” which means, Brahman (pure consciousness) alone is real and the world is an appearance and all sentient beings are none other than Brahman.

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