

Metaphysical Significance of Death in Heidegger and Advaita Vedanta

Athulya A R

Research scholar (Dept. of Vedanta)

SSUS, Kalady

Abstract:

Death is inevitable for any born being. But man has not yet been able to accept or embrace the reality of death. He is always afraid of death. Martin Heidegger who exposed the metaphysical perspective of death claims that, man afraid death because it destroys the very existence of Dasein (being of human). According to Heidegger the possibility of a Dasein becoming authentic or inauthentic ends with death. After that, his very existence disappears. That is the reason why man is always afraid of death. But most human beings do not realize that they have authentic possibility (identifying their own self) until death. This paper explains the ontological aspect of death in Heidegger. In addition to explaining the philosophical dimension of death from Heidegger's point of view, the article also reveals the metaphysical significance of death in Advaita vedanta, which believes in the immortality of Ātman.

Keywords: Ātman, Dasein, They-self, death and rebirth.

Introduction

Each of us leads a life to the reality of death. Heidegger explains the concept of 'Death' through the phrase 'being-towards-death'. Heidegger's 'being-towards-death' is not Dasein's journey to death. Rather, it is Dasein's recognition of death as his own most possibility. It is doubtful how death can lead to authentic possibility or inauthentic possibility. But Heidegger explains in great detail how the thought of death leads Dasein to authenticity.

For Heidegger, anxiety and death are not two ideas that need to be explained separately. Dasein, who becomes aware and conscious of his existence through anxiety, thinks about death and realizes that he has to face it alone. In this way the thought of death individualizes Dasein. One cannot accept the death of another. He must experience that himself. Dasein itself is recognized as a dying being in the state of anxiety. By 'dying being' Heidegger means "death is something that stands before us - something impending" (B. T. sec: 250/p 294)

By examine the analysis of death in Advaita vedanta, it has its additions and disagreements with Heidegger. Advaita and Heideggerian philosophy alike agree that thinking about death has the potential to lead the path of self-realization. It is man's fear of death that drives him to overcome it, or that motivates man to know deep about it.

From the Yama-Naciketa debate in Kathopanisad we can see the metaphysical position of death in Advaita philosophy. Arriving at yamapuri, Naciketa's first wishes to grant Yama for a boon for his father's happiness "śānta samkalpah sumanah yathā" (Ka. Up. I. 1.10). As the second boon, Naciketa asks the fire that caused the ascension to heaven. The reason why Nachiketa is attracted to the heaven is that there is no fear and no death "svarge loka na bhayam kiñcanāsti na tatra tvam na jarayā bibheti" (Ka. Up. I. 1.12). What is clear from this is that the biggest problem a person has in worldly life is fear and death. The third is the greatest and most important of the three boons that Naciketa asks. As the third boon, Naciketa explores the mystery of afterlife or death "yeyam prete vicikitsa manuṣye -astityeke nāyamastīti caike etadvidyāmanuṣṭstvayāham" (Ka. Up. I. 1.20). Yama immediately gave Naciketa the first two boons he asked for and blessed him. But here Yama is trying to dissuade from the third boon. A closer look at these three boons reveals that they are presented by upanisad with a systematic metaphysical methodology. Naciketa's first gift was for the happiness of his father. Here we need to look at the worldly life and the individual who values its

relationships. In worldly life one has the most intimacy with one's personal relationships. Their happiness and peace will be the priority for that individual. This indicates the severity of external impositions such as son and wife. This is what Sankara said "thinking that when the son and wife is happy or when he is sad, I am happy or sad", *putrabhāryādiṣu sakaleṣu vikaleṣu vā....(Brahmasūtrasāṅkarabhāṣyam, upodghāta)*.

It is his dissatisfaction with the things of this world that drives him to ask for the second boon of heaven. Or the things he fears and dislikes in this world. For an individual who is absorbed in worldly life, the things that disturb his peace of mind are the fear of disease, fatigue and death above all else. While praising the heavenly world, Naciketa adds two more things like hunger and thirst etc. Man strives in this world primarily to satisfy his hunger. That is why he works and earns everything without sleep. Heaven is more attractive because there is no hunger, thirst or death. These are the basic challenges that a man faces in his life. The Vedas give him the knowledge of the karmic paradise before him, as he seeks a way to overcome it.

Naciketa's third boon is a clear demonstration of how the analysis of death leads to self-realization. There Naciketa asks what is the secret of death. But in the commentary Sankara clears that by asking the secret of death, Naciketa really seeking the secret of self-knowledge "*ātmanonirṇaya vijñānam yat, tat brūhi kathaya nah asmabhyām*" (Ka. Up S. B. 1.1.29). Naciketa himself had to say when asked for the second boon, that there were not afraid of death in heaven. There may be a suspicion for why the third boon was asked for, and according to the scriptures, heaven is created through sacrificial rituals and the claim here of Advaita is that anything created through karma will perish. Then the abode in heaven will be only for a limited time. Therefore, the fear of death will not be eliminated forever by one's ability to live in heaven. That is why Naciketa explored the mystery of death even after knowing the path of heaven. The *guru-siṣyasamvāda* (preceptor-disciple dialogue) in Kenopanisad is another example of how the right thought about death can lead to the path of self-knowledge. There, through the first two chapters, disciples asked about the creation of living beings and the senses that sustain the body. The question of the third disciple, Kausalya, was about the birth of the soul and its departure from the body "*kuta eṣa prāṇo jāyate kathamātyasmins'arira ātmānam vā pravibhajya katham prathisthate kenotkramate.*" (From what this soul is born, how it came into the body, how it separates itself into many, how it leaves the body) (Pr. up. III.1). It is commonly said that death is the process of the soul leaving the body. The Guru answered accordingly to both the two questions asked earlier. But here on hearing the question of the origin of the soul and its departure, the Guru happily said, "*atipras'nānpṛcchasi brahmanistho asīti*" (the questions asked by you are beyond worldly matters, hence, you are a self-seeker). (Pr. Up. III.2). Any disciple interested in vedic studies may have such doubts about the origin of the universe and its dealings. But Kausalya's question is purely about the self. In this context, the analysis of self-knowledge, begins with the departure or death of the soul. It is clear from these two upanisadic contexts that, ontological analysis of death act as a precursor of self-recognition. It is the fear of death that drives man to know his reality.

‘They’ in the event of death

Everyone knows that they or other cannot interfere in anyone's death. Death is something that one has to face alone. If so, they may be wondering what is meant by 'they' in the event of death. In Dasein's understanding of death, Heidegger also incorporates they in the analysis of death to reveal how 'their' involvement takes place, as Dasein's everyday experience takes place entirely in the influential world of They. By the process of falling, Dasein will be attracted to the idle talks of they. It understands and interprets things from the idle talks of the they world. They presenting death in front of Dasein, is something that unavoidable in life. Through their idle talks, Dasein assumes that he has a clear vision of death and that death has no particular relevance beyond that. "*They say 'death is certain' and saying so, they implant in Dasein the illusion that it is certain of its death*" (B.T. sec 257 / p. 301). And people do think, that thinking of death is cowardice. They claim that one thinks of death when one feels insecurity. Heidegger shows how 'they' can create an inauthentic view of death for the Dasein by exposing such things to the wild.

In the context of death, Advaita treated *uṣmad* (they) in a different sense. Advaita also admits the fact that, the individualization of Atman is the ontological significance of death. However, because of man's affinity for his relationships, this individualization is not realized in daily life.

For Ātman, impositions (*adhyāsa*) on his relationship can sometimes be as deep as the internal impositions. That is why, one considers the pleasures and sorrows as his own and it affects the individual itself. It is because of this *adhyāsa* that when a wife or son dies, he wants his death with them as well. We often see people giving up their lives when their loved ones die. The reason for this is that we do not know the reality of death.

Let's continue the discussion on death from its basic characteristics. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about death is the fact that "death is something impending." Until then, Dasein realizes that he will not be able to overcome his death with what he has achieved, or what he has to achieve yet. That is why Heidegger says "*Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death*" (B. T.251 / p. 194). Here Dasein understands the reality of thrownness into death. According to Heidegger, death is also Dasein's awareness of his whole totality. Dasein realizes that he is on a journey from his birth to the inevitable possibility of his death. Dasein can project his possibilities of being-towards-death in two ways. We can live by waiting for death thinking that there is death if there is birth. This thought leads man to a kind of laziness. He thinks he's going to die anyway, so he is not going to do anything special. This is the inauthentic Dasein's attitude towards 'being-towards-death'. Here Dasein projects existential possibilities (ontic possibilities). For Heidegger "*the factual knowledge or ignorance which prevails in any Dasein as to its own most being-towards-the end, is only the expression of the existential possibility that there are different ways of maintaining oneself in the being*" (B. T. 252 / 295).

The authentic way of being is quite different from this. Authentic Dasein does not just fear about death or wait for it. Rather, he accepts death as his non-relational own most possibility. The hymn in the Bagvatgītā, He who is born, death is certain, is in line with the above context. Here Krishna tells Arjuna about the reality of death. Here Krishna adds another quote "*tasmādaparihārye arthe na tvamśocitumarhasi* (Bhagavatgītā. II. 27). According to Advaita, death is not something that can be controlled by anyone. So, it is only right that we should not worry about it. In this way the authentic Dasein or Ātman does not grieve over death, both from the Advaita's point of view and from the Heidegger's point of view. The Gita also highlights the concept of 'cannot be outstripped' by being unresolved.

Anticipation

Anticipation generally means to predict or to look forward. In Heideggerian terminology the term anticipation is used in the context of death. For Dasein, who has fallen into the idle talks of 'They', death is just a frightening but common occurrence for everyone. In this way Dasein that is fallen into they will project its inauthentic possibilities.

But once the ontological aspect of death is understood, Dasein can project his authentic possibilities. Heidegger argues that being-towards-death is the ontological characteristic of Dasein's being. Here Dasein realizes his reality of being-towards-death and accepts it as his own most possibility. But being towards this possibility, as being towards death is so to comport ourselves towards death that in this being and for it death reveals itself as a possibility. Our terminology for such being -towards this possibility is 'anticipation' of this possibility.

Heidegger anticipation is generally interpreted by adding resoluteness to it. To understand how the analysis of death in Heidegger's philosophy leads to authenticity, it is necessary to know what Heidegger aims for by anticipatory-resoluteness. The word resoluteness means vow. In that sense, anticipatory -resoluteness is the determination to anticipate what is to come. According to Heidegger, anticipatory-resoluteness means Dasein's responsibility for his authenticity, acknowledging his own possibility of death.

In anticipation, Dasein realizes what he really is. Therefore, Dasein is able to understand his factual lostness in they-self and turn away from it. (B. T.263 / p. 307). Freedom from their illusions is the greatest feature of anticipation. 'mokṣa' also aims at freedom from Advaita and they (*uṣmad*) or *anātman*. Śankara says that "*bandanāśa eva hi mokṣa*" (liberation is the destruction of bondage) (Br. Up. S. B. 3rd. 3.1).

Death is here referred to as the lustful deeds of ignorance. Mokṣa (freedom) is the destruction of this ignorance. Heidegger made it clear in anticipation that, death would blow away the impermanence of others. Kathopaniṣad made it clear through the Yama - Naciketa dialogue that one who thinks about death in the right direction, or the mystery of death, is aware of the eternity of others in this world.

According to Heidegger, anticipation gives man the possibility of freedom to choose itself. According to Advaita, Ātman attains freedom only through self – recognition. Bondage itself is the act of being caught up in the world without realizing it. If you think about how Advaita connects death with freedom, for Advaita bondage is treated as death. “*ityatah bandana rūpasya mrtyoh svarūpamucyate*” (Br. up. S. B. III. 2). The Upanishads define death as a complex of ignorance and desire “*tena kāraṇena mrtyoh avidyā kāmakarmasamudāyasya yānti*” (Ka. up. S. B. II. 1.2) This is why it is said that after realization the atman does not die, or it is not afraid of death “*mahāntam vibhumātmānam matva dhīro na śocati*” (Ka. up. II. 1.4).

Conclusion

Whether Advaita or Heideggerian philosophy, the proper analysis of death is seen as the precursor of self-realization. The ontological aspect of death individualizes oneself as well as determines one’s own reality. The difference between Advaita and Heidegger in terms of death is referred in the context of rebirth. For Heidegger, the possibility of Dasein becoming authentic is eliminated with death. But in Advaita every Atman get another chance in his future lives to become realized. If the Dasein of Heidegger is finite being, but infinity is the specialty of Ātman in Advaita.

References:

1. Brahmasūtrasankarabhashyam, Choukamba Publications, Varanasi, 1994
2. Bhagavatgītā sāṅkarabhāṣyam, Gita Press, Varanasi, 1995.
3. Dasopanishadbhashyam, Choukamba Publications, Varanasi, 1998
4. Heidegger Martin, Being and Time, Blackwell Publishers, U K, 1983

