The Advaita Theory of Perception

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Abstract

My present project concern itself how the term perception enplane by Advaita. According to the Advaita theory of Perception, it is the Chaitanya within us that makes perception possible. The Chetana (intelligence) within us unites with the chenta in the object, and result is perception. The following well-know illustration from the Vedanta paribhasa gives an account of the nature of perception: “as water from a tank may flow through a channel into a plot of land and assume in shape, so the radiant mind (taijasa-Antahkarana) goes out through the eye or any Vedanta paribhasa cites instances, of perception experience where no sense contact is involved 5, such as pleasure pain, other internal perceptions where modes of mind are directly apprehended, further, it clearly states that the fact of the sense organ is not the

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To the Advaitins the whole world is nothing but the manifestation of Brahman or Consciousness (Caitanya). Keeping this presupposition in view Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, a philosopher belonging to the Advaita school, thinks that mereconnec-tion (sannikarsa) between sense-organ and an object is not the cause of perceptual cognition. If the whole world is covered by the Consciousness (Caitanya), an object ontologically cannot remain without being covered by the said Consciousness. If the Consciousness were taken as an all-pervading entity, it would logically follow that nothing is left uncovered by this. Hence all the objects including sense-organ etc are covered by this. Though the Reality or the Consciousness is one, it may have some limited forms which are called limiting adjuncts (upadhis) for our phenomenal necessity. The Upadhi or limiting adjunct experienced in our life is called constitutive while the main entity, which is free from limiting adjuncts (niravacchhina or nirupadhika) is called regulative. In the Dialectic part of the Critique of the Pure Reason Kant institutes a distinction between regulative and constitutive ideas in the context of cosmological ideas. By 'ideas' Kant means a set of apriori ideas such that are derived from Reason, the highest human faculty. One feature of these ideas is that there can never be intuitions or facts corresponding to them. But they do regulate the ways in which certain other ideas are to be used. Freedom, Ought, Immortality of the soul, God etc. are regulative notions. The constitutive ideas always have intuitions corresponding to them, and together they render knowledge possible. The apriori categories of understanding are constitutive notions. They are apriori but intentional, and it is with their help that we can organize the world as and when we come to know it. The result of the application of constitutive ideas is verifiability. But the application of the
regulative ideas is never verifiable, but they can be dispensed with. They are unalienable presuppositions of human state of affairs. The limiting adjuncts like ghatakasa (space limited by ajar), month, week, day, night etc. are constitutive in the sense that they have intuitions corresponding to them through which our phenomenal purpose is served while the absolute entities like Time (kala), Space (akasa) etc. that are free from limiting adjuncts (nirupadhika) are accepted as regulative on account of the fact that they are accepted ontologically but not verifiable through experience or there we do not find intuitions or facts corresponding to them. That is why; upadhi is called an introducer (paricayaka) by the Naiyayikas.¹

The Advaitins also accept three types of Consciousness though it is ontologically one. These limiting adjuncts are Consciousness limited by an object (visayavacchinnacaitanya), Consciousness limited by the mental mode in the form of an object (antahkaranaavrrttyavacchinnacaitanya) and Consciousness limited by mind (antahkaranavacchinnacaitanya). These limiting adjuncts of the Consciousness are technically called visayacaitanya, pramanacaitanya and pramatrcaitanya respectively² just as Time, though one in number, has got various limiting adjuncts like hour, month, week, fortnight etc. Keeping these metaphysical presuppositions in view Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has accepted two criteria of perceptuality- Jnanagata (existing in cognition) and visayagata (existing in an object). To him when there is a union between pramanacaitanya (Consciousness limited by mental mode-antahkaranaavrrti) and visayacaitanya (Consciousness limited by an object), there is the perceptuality of knowledge or cognition (jnanagatapratyaksatva).³ It is to be borne in mind that he has made a clear distinction between perception of the knowledge of a jar and perception of ajar. In the case of the perception of the knowledge of a jar there is a unity between visayacaitanyaand pramanacaitanya, but pramatrcaitanya remains isolated under such situation. How is such union of these caitanyas possible? Dharmaraja Adhvarindra had made an effort to convince about the logic of such description. When our mind goes out of the body with the help of the sense-organ and assumes the shape of the object then it called mental mode (vrtti) which is also a limited form of the Consciousness. To them mind or antahkarana has no shape of its own just as a liquid substance but it can assume the shape of the object just as water assumes the form of the container. If this were the case, the visayacaitanya (Consciousness limited by an object) becomes identified with its corresponding mental mode (antahkaranaavrrtti). The union of these two limited forms of consciousness gives rise to the perception of the knowledge of an object. The Pramatracaitanya (Consciousness limited by mind) who, being a knower, remains isolated and perceives the knowledge of an object (jnanagatapratyaksatva)⁴ after retaining its character of being a knower. In this case there is the distinction between a knower (jnata) and a known object (jneya). That is why; it is the perceptuality of knowledge of an object (jnanagatapratyaksatva). In this case the cognition of an object is perceived.

In the case of inference etc. the mind does not go to the space occupied by fire etc. on account of the fact that the latter is not in connection with the eye etc. In the same way, in the perceptual cognition of a jar in the form-'This jar', the jar etc. and their corresponding mental states in the form of those are united in the same space outside the body, and hence the Consciousness limited by both is one and the same. For, the mental states and objects like jar etc. do not produce any difference due to their occupation of the same space. On account of this the ether limited by a jar existing in a temple is not different from the ether limited by temple.

In the like manner, in the perception of a jar as 'This jar', the mental state in the form of the jar being in contact with the jar, the Consciousness limited by that mental state is not different from the Consciousness limited by the jar and hence in the knowledge of a jar there is a perception so far as the jar is concerned. One can perceive the cognition-'I am happy', because the Consciousness limited by happiness etc. and the Consciousness limited by the mental state in the form of that are invariably limited by two adjuncts occupying the same space. It may be argued that when an individual recollects happiness etc. of the past, he may have perceptual experience of
the happiness remaining in the past. In reply it can be said that perception is not possible in such cases. Because the happiness that is recollected from the past is a past event and the mental state in the form of the recollection of the same is a present event. As these two limiting adjuncts in the mind remain in two different times, the criterion of the unification of the two is not maintained. Hence in such cases the perceptual awareness is not possible.

It may again argued that when someone realizes the righteousness etc. existing in him through verbal testimony, it may be taken as perceptual due the identification of the Consciousness in the form of righteousness and its corresponding mental state. This is not acceptable, because any object cannot come under the purview of perception. In this case the righteousness is not capable of being perceived. Hence the question of its perception does not arise at all. In the case of the cognition in the form 'The Mountain is fiery' there is perceptuality so far as the mountain is concerned, because there we find the amalgamation of the two forms of Consciousness i.e., the Consciousness in the form of mountain and its corresponding mental state. So far as the cognition of fire is concerned, it is inferential due to not fulfilling the above-mentioned criterion. Applying the same principle it can be said that in the case of the cognition in the form: 'The sandal wood is fragrant', the knowledge of the sandalwood is perceptual while the cognition of fragrance is inferential.

There is another type of perception, which is called the perceptuality of an object (visayagatapratyakṣatva). By virtue of being cognition of an object in the previous case there is a knower; otherwise the knowledge of an object becomes meaningless. If it is said that there is the perceptuality of an object, it should be treated as different from the earlier one. It is not knowledge, which is perceived, but the object only. Such a situation cannot give rise to knower-known relationship (jñāt-jneya-bhavasambandha). Hence Dharmaraja Adhvarindra opines that in such cases there is only the knower in the form of consciousness (pramatṛcāitanya); but the other two i.e., consciousness limited by mental mode (antahkaranavṛtti) and consciousness limited by an object are united in the knower (pramata) and are absorbed in it. It is described by him as 'pramatsattatāritikatātakavabhavah' i.e., there will be an absence of the existence of the other forms of consciousness excepting the existence of pramata or knower. It has been said that the amalgamation of the three into one is not the real intention (nātavadaikyam), but it is the awareness of the existence of the Pramatṛcāitana in which other forms of Consciousness are subsumed. Therefore, the pramatṛcāitana would be an object of our awareness, but other forms of the same are the manifestations of the pramatṛcāitana and hence their existence does not come to our awareness.

When a person thinks himself identified with the world, it is the stage of liberation due to the absence of more than one Reality (Advaita). At this stage an object is 'not merely an object' but 'subjectified object'. Though there is no difference between the expressions 'subjectified object' and 'objectified subject' as evidenced in the Bhagavadgita-'Sarvabhumasthamatmanam sarvabhuhati catmanV' (i.e., extension of self to others and bringing other§ under self), Dharmaraja preferred to use 'subjectified object' since pramata (knower) only remains at this stage being identified with others. In this case an object or visaya is engulfed by the pramata or knower. As the knower (pramata) sees himself in the object, it may be called self-perception (atma-gatapratyakṣa). Moreover, self is the locus (adhisthana) on which the object is superimposed in the phenomenal stage. To the Advaitins locus or adhisthana is never contradicted (avadhita) by the subsequent cognition. In the case of snake-rope illusion the locus i.e., rope is not contradicted but the superimposed object or adhvasta i.e., snake is contradicted by the cognition of the locus i.e., rope. In the like manner the Advaitins believe that Brahman or Self in the locus on which all the objects are superimposed. For this reason the cognition of the phenomenal objects are contradicted, because they are sublated by the Ultimate Reality. Keeping the above clarifications in view it may be said that in the case of the perceptuality of an object
At the stage of the perceptuality of an object there is the absence of the existence of other objects excepting the existence of knower (pramata). Is it not a state of liberation? Such a situation is found temporally at the time of aesthetic enjoyment (rasa). Abhinavagupta has explained this state of 'subjectified object' as the melting of the state of the knower or pramata (pramatrabhavavigalana).\(^7\) Just as an object when liquidified covers many areas, in the like manner the knower can expand itself in such a way so that all objects are included in him. At this time he is not confined within himself but expanded himself to all the objects and hence objects have no other existence other than that of the knower. That is why; an individual can enjoy aesthetic pleasure (rasa) as he considers the pathos etc. belonging to characters of the novel or drama as his own due to emotional involvement. This sharing of others feeling is called by Abhinavagupta as tanmayabhavana i.e., becoming one with other.\(^8\) Actually the feeling existing in an individual is transmitted to all the spectators. If each and every reader receives the same sensitivity or feeling, there is a corresponding fact, which is going on in all the hearts of the spectators (sakala-sahrdaya-samvada-salita). Such a phenomenon is otherwise known as 'absorption of all the audiences towards a particular object' (sarvasamajikanam ekaghanata)\(^9\). To Visvsnatha also the subject i.e., pramata sees himself being identified with it (pramata tadabhedena svatmanam pratipadyate)\(^10\). In fact, self exists everywhere including the art-object. Hence the Aestheticians are of the opinion that the relishment itself is rasa (rasaniyah rasah). It is the relishment of the bliss arising out of self-knowledge (as reflected in the characters of the drama), which is called svavidananda (pleasure arising from self-cognition), as if we have undertaken an activity of chewing (carvanavyapara) the bliss generating from self-knowledge. To Abhinavagupta who is chiefly influenced by the Advaitins such a chewing activity of the bliss of the self-knowledge is called Rasa.\(^11\) This interpretation of aesthetic experience would not have been possible, had there been no solid foundation of the perceptuality of object (Visayagatapratyaksatva). In fact the aesthetic enjoyment is nothing but the extension of self to the object, which is called Visayagatapratyaksa.

A question may be raised whether such visayagatapratyaksa is equivalent to the Advaita concept of liberation or not. In reply, it can be said that such perception and the aesthetic enjoyment is qualitatively same but quantitatively different. When ajar is perceived, there is the feeling of the non-duality of the self and the jar until the absorption breaks up. When such absorption does not break, an individual will see the whole world as his own self. This non-dual experience will remain forever and such situation is described as liberation according to the Advaitins. The perceptual experience of the phenomenal objects like ajar etc. occurs temporally and hence it is, though qualitatively same, it is quantitatively different. Both the experiences- the visayagatapratyaksa and aesthetic experience contain disinterested pleasure arising out of self-relishment-atmananda. In fact a human being's mind is dominated by the sattvaguna at this situation and hence it is touched by rajah and tamoguna. Due to the prominence of sattvaguna an individual can enjoy the self-knowledge identified with him and hence he is not touched by any other knowledge (vedyantarasparsasunya). This bliss is a highest type of ananda arising from self-revelation (svapraakasananda), which is qualitatively equivalent to the taste of Brahman, but not quantitatively, as the
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larity) between two existing earlier or at present time.

Two types of perception, apart from the previously mentioned one, are jivasaksi and isvarasaksi. It has been
mentioned that the distinction between an individual being (jiva) and witness in self (jivasaksi) lies on the
status of internal sense-organ (antahkarana). If it remains in an individual being as an adjective or visesana,
it is called jiva. If the same antahkarana remains as a limiting adjunct or upadhi in a jiva, it is called jivasaksi.
In the same way, the consciousness qualified by maya is called isvara or God (mayavacchinnam Caitanyam
paramesvarah). When the same maya remains as a limiting adjunct (upadhi), it is called witness in God

The indeterminate perception or nirvikalpaka pratyaksa is accepted in the case of the recognitive cognitions
like 'This is that Devadatta' (so yam devadattah) or 'That art thou' (tattvamasi) on account of the fact that it
does not reveal the relation between the two i.e., this and that Devadatta or That and thou. It has been
interpreted by the Advaitins that the sentence conveys the sense that Devadatta exists in Devadatta himself
or an individual self exists in himself in the form of Brahman. But they do not admit relation between two by the
term - 'vaisistyanavagahi'. If the meaning of the aforesaid sentences is pondered upon, it will be revealed that
these are not actually relation-free. In other words, like other components the relation is also revealed in such
cases due to the following reasons. First, how do we know that Devadatta exists in himself without the
assumption of the relation of identity between them? Any type of recognitive cognition presupposes the
relation of identity (at least in the sense of similarity) between two existing earlier or at present time. To the
Advaitins identity or tadatmya is the vital relation in the phenomenal cognition. In fact, they admit tadatmya
in the places where there is a part and whole relation (avayava-avayavi-bhava- sambandha) etc. In fact, the
Vaisesikas would accept samavaya or inherence as a relation in these cases. Hence tadatmya has very often
been accepted as a relation. In the cases cited above there must be a relation of identity (tadatmya) in the sense
of similarity between them. That is why, the recognitive knowledge is possible. Secondly, though there is no
absolute identity between this Devadatta and that Devadatta or an individual being and Brahman, there must
be an essential identity (svarupatadatmya) between them. Otherwise, the sentences could not have provided
the intended meaning. Lastly, the cognition coming through the sentences are called relational in character, as
it is sentential in nature. A sentence becomes meaningful if there is a word, its meaning and their relation. It
may be asked whether in the words and their meaning there is vacya-vacaka-bhava (i.e., expresser-expressed
relationship) or not. If the answer is in positive, relation is accepted between them. If not, the sentences cannot
provide the desired meaning due to the lack of vacakatva (expressive character) of the words. In fact,
Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has accepted the meaningfulness of the sentences, which entails the existence of the
relation in them. Hence the definition of nirvikalpaka perception as formulated by the Advaitins is hardly
adequate. At least this type of definition fails to justify nirvikalpaka cognition. The problem has been well
taken by the Advaitins. To them the meaning of the sentences likes 'so yam devadattah' or 'Tat tvamasi' etc is
indivisible (akhandartha). When the sentences produce right cognition without being related to the relation
among the words, it is called indivisible meaning. Only the pratipadikas, which are free from the suffixes
causing relation, can give rise to indivisible meaning. In the case of the nirvikalpaka sentence there is no
relation between the meanings of the terms, but it gives an indivisible meaning after ignoring the individual
ones. (Idameva tattvamasi ityadivakyanam akhandarham yat samsargavagahi-yatharthajnananakatvatvam
iti).

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The property, which is related to the predicate (karyanvayi), distinguisher (vyayarttaka) and present ivartamana) is called visesana while something, which cannot be related to the predicate (karyanvayi), distinguisher (vyayarttaka) and present (vartamana) is called upadhi. Though the distinction between visesana and upadhi has been shown clearly, it is very difficult to understand the exact position whether the inner organ or antahkarana imains in an individual being as an adjunct or limiting adjunct. In the same way the position or status of maya in consciousness (caitanya) cannot be known with the help of the reason. Without the help of intuition it is very difficult to have an idea about the status of mind in an individual being or the status of maya in a consciousness. It needs vision to know the same. If these are known transcendently, why are they called the forms of perception? The phenomena of jivasaksi and isvarasaksi are more metaphysical in character than epistemological. Hence the Advaitins cannot do 'pure epistemology' without the help of metaphysics.

In connection with the immediate awareness (aparoksajnana) Dharmaraja Adhvarindra has pointed out that such perceptual awareness may sometimes arise from the testimony also, which is called perceptual awareness generated through verbal testimony (sabdajanyapratyaksa).

It has been argued by the Advaitins that, when an individual comes to know of his happiness through the utterance of the sentence- 'You are happy' (tvam sukhi) by some body else, would it be considered as perceptual? The answer is in the positive, as it is always desired by the Advaitins. They have put forward an example of perceptual awareness through some testimonial cognition. A leader of a team is counting the members of his team to confirm that no body is left behind. Among the ten members every time he is counting nine members but not ten. Being pointed out by some body else he comes to know that he has not counted himself. Ultimately the person pointed him out as the tenth person and said- 'You are the tenth' (dasamastvamasi). This is a case of perception, no doubt, which is generated through the utterance of the sentence by some body else. Actually this type of awareness suggests a great domain of the Advaita philosophy. To the Advaitins an individual being is always free, but he does not know it. When it is pointed out that he is free from suffering through the injunction of the Srstra or through sravana (hearing), manana (reflection) and nididhyasana (meditating), he suddenly sees himself free. This freedom is not new to him, but it is acquirement of what is acquired (praptasya praptih). An individual's liberation or freedom is not at all a new achievement, but awareness of something, which is already known. This knowing of the known is possible through the testimonial statement as found in different Sruti. The function of the testimony in the form of Sruti is to make someone aware about his own position and status. It provides the true picture of human being like his freedom etc. about which he did not know. Hence, perception in the field of freedom or liberation is generated through the agamic statement, which is very much significant in Indian Philosophical systems.
Reference


3. Ibid, p.25-28


6. Ibid p. 8-12