Is Experience Superior to the Scriptures?:

Madhva's View on *Pramāṇa*

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1. Introduction

Madhva (1238–1317)¹⁾ as a Vedānta-philosopher as well as a devotional Vaiṣṇavic theologian, opposed to the *Advaita* view which Śāṅkara established, for the reason that the latter's theory contradicts all three *pramāṇas*. Against the *Advaita* view, Madhva concludes that all *pramāṇas* prove the mutual absolute difference of the Lord, individual selves (*jīva*) and unconscious substances (*jaḍa*).²⁾

This unique view of Madhva is based on our ordinary experience (*anubhava*). But there lies a serious problem. Does the ordinary experience have such a reliability and authority that can put off the identity between Brahman and *ātman* that is taught by the Upaniṣads such as in the “*tat tvam asi*” sentence. The present article examines the way Madhva has dealt with the experience (*anubhava*), by researching his two small works, *Viṣṇutattva-nirṇaya* and *Pramāṇalakṣaṇa*, and Jayatīrtha's (1365–88) commentary on those.

2. Contents of Experience (*Anubhava*)

The experience Madhva puts emphasis on is the experience of difference (*bheda-anubhava*). No one sees or feels in within himself the qualities inherent in the Lord, such as being the cause of the whole world.³⁾ Madhva has stated this casual experience ahead of other means of knowledge.⁴⁾ Madhva has given a great importance to this ordinary feeling simply because it is so basic and undeniable.

Also important is that Madhva has counted experience as the fourth *pramāṇa*,⁵⁾ emphasizing its pre-eminence over others. In the same context, he contrasts the knowledge from experience with *bāhya* which are concerned with external objects.⁶⁾ So we understand that what Madhva means by *anubhava* is the internal knowledge, which can be called the self-perception (*svadṛś*). Besides, this experience covers contradicted knowledges (*mithyā-*

jñāna or *viparyaya*).⁷⁾ We have valid notions, as well as false or ambiguous ones. Madhva insists that the existence of the latter is also proved by experience. For example, the knowledge of a silver on a pearl shell is wrong and deniable, but the fact that this wrong knowledge arises cannot be denied. As evidenced by this, experience is inside ourselves and undeniable.

3. Experience as *Sākṣin*'s Knowledge

Madhva often uses this experience as the reason (*hetu*) for his theory or objection to Śaṅkara's view. In one of such cases, when the validity of memory (*smṛti*) and so on was at issue, Madhva has brought the reason *yathārthatvānubhavāt*.⁸⁾ On this statement, Jayatīrtha has paraphrased *anubhava* with *sākṣi-siddha*.⁹⁾ The phrase *sākṣi-siddha* is also used by Madhva himself.¹⁰⁾ So the issue is what or who is *sākṣin*.

Concerning this point, Madhva counted *sākṣin* as one of the seven direct perceptions (*pratyakṣa*).¹¹⁾ According to Jayatīrtha's explanation, *sākṣin* is one of sense organs (*indriya*), but of a different kind than other six organs as mere instruments for perception.¹²⁾ The knower (*pramāṭṛ*) himself is called *sākṣin*, and is equated with pure knowledge (*jñāna*). So he is also recognized as *ātman*.

And counted there as its objects are (1) his own self (*ātman*), (2) happiness and so on, and (3) space, time, and so on.¹³⁾ From this statement, we can find out characteristics of *sākṣin*'s knowledge. It's true that *ātman* is out of the scope of the direct perception and we don't have any organ capable to perceive ourselves, but the concept of *I* or *mine* does exist beyond doubt. Likewise, our feelings of happiness or distress is limited to one who feels them, and no one outside can object those. It must be noted is that space and time are also included in *sākṣin*'s objects. We experience as they exist indeed, but cannot prove them by perception or inference.

Madhva and Jayatīrtha, therefore, see *sākṣin* as the knower of things which are unverifiable but undeniable from experience. It (or he) never falls into error.¹⁴⁾ This is because *sākṣin*, also known as *svadṛś*, is self-luminous (possessing *svapṛakāśatva*).¹⁵⁾ The validity of experience is assured only by the very fact that we really experience. It is independent, so no other *pramāṇas* have nothing to do with it. Rather, all other *pramāṇas* depend on it,¹⁶⁾ since it is experience that affirms authenticity of those *pramāṇas*.¹⁷⁾

4. Superiority of Experience to the Scriptures

Sākṣin's perception serves as the foundation for other *pramāṇas* to be *pramāṇas* because of its self-luminosity, and is never denied by external knowledges. Seeing that this so-called "self-righteous" experience really perceives that "we individual selves and things **are not** the Lord," this notion must not be doubted. Thus, though the scriptures are the only means to know the Lord, if they are incompatible with this experience, even they should be rejected or re-interpreted as in line with this experience. It's because the scriptures' authority cannot be validated as *pramāṇa* without the support of experience¹⁸⁾ or *Sākṣin*'s perception.

In most of other systems of Indian epistemology, the scriptures are superior to the direct perception. For otherwise the latter would be enough and there would be no room for the scriptures. Following this convention, the *Advaita* school puts great emphasis on the scriptures as teaching the highest truth (*paramārtha*) and, instead, reduces ordinary experiences to the false or illusionary realm. On the contrary, Madhva's school gives a great importance to experience, or the knowledge of *sākṣin*, since it is too ordinary to doubt. In this respect, they are so realistic as compared to Advaitin's metaphysical standpoint. Behind Madhva's perversion of Upaniṣads, this unusual inclination to realism is remarkable.

1) About the date of Madhva and Jayatīrtha, see B. N. K. Sharma, *History of the Dvaita School of Vedānta and Its Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1961; rev. 2000), pp.77–83 & pp.245–249.

2) Cf. Ikehata Koreto 池端惟人, "Madhva no toku betsu (bheda) no ninshiki shudan" マドヴァの説く別 (bheda) の認識手段 [The means of proof of difference in Madhva's thought], *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 [Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies] 122 (2010): pp.255–252.

3) VTN p.16, l.10; anumāna-siddheśvarāc ca bhedo 'nubhavata eva siddho **jīvasya; asarva-kartṛtv-enānubhavāt** /

4) VTN p.22, ll.10–12; katham ca jīva-paramātmaikyē sarva-śrutinām tātparyam yujyate? **sarva-pramāṇa-viruddhatvāt / tathā hy anubhava-virodhaḥ** —na hy ahaṁ sarva-jñāḥ sarveśvaro nirduḥkho nirdoṣa iti vā kasyacid anubhavaḥ / asti ca tad-viparyayeṇānubhavaḥ /

5) VTN p.17, ll.1–2; aduṣṭam indriyam tv akṣam tarko 'duṣṭas tathānumā / āgamo 'duṣṭa-vākyaṁ ca **svadṛk cānubhavaḥ smṛtaḥ** /

6) VTN p.17, ll.4–5; jñānam ca dvi-vidham **bāhyam tathānubhava-rūpakam / baly evānubhavas tatra nirdoṣam tv akṣajādikam** /

7) PL p.68, ll.1–2; smṛti-pramāṇa-dvaividhya-mātra-kalpane mithyā-jñānāder nirākaraṇād **anubhava-virodhaḥ / tad-anubhavābhāva ity ukte 'nubhavaḥ smṛtiś ca nāstīty ukte kim uttaram?**

8) “Because of the experience of [memory and additional statements] being accordant with reality” (cf. PL p.66, ll.5–6). To be noted is *yathārthatva* or *yāthārthya* is, in Madhva’s opinion, the essential qualification to be *pramāṇa*. The context there is that though memory and additional statements (*anuvāda*) make known things already established, they must be also *pramāṇa*, because, at any rate, they are accordant with and never go far beyond reality.

9) PLṬ p.134, l.16; *yathārthatvānubhavāt* // . . . *tādṛśam ca yāthārthyam smṛteḥ sākṣi-siddham* /

10) For example is PL p.66, ll.18–19; *tasya* (= *anumānāgama-prāmāṇyasya*) *sākṣi-siddhatvam* cej *jagat-satyatvam* api *sākṣi-siddham* /

11) PL p.66, l.5; *pratyakṣam sapta-vidham sākṣi-ṣaḍ-indriya-bhedena* /

12) PLṬ p.123, ll.12–13; *dvi-vidham indriyam / pramātṛ-svarūpaṁ tad-atiriktam ceti / tatra svarūpendriyam sākṣīty ucyate / sa ca jñāna-rūpaḥ* /

13) PLṬ p.123, ll.13–14; *tasyātma-svarūpatvam tad-dharmās ca sukhādayo bahiś cākāśa-kālādayo ’pi viṣayāḥ / sukhādīnām bhinnendriya-viṣayatve kadācid aparokṣa-bhrama-viṣayatāpātāt* /

14) PLṬ p.123, ll.14–15; *ananyathātva-niyamaḥ sākṣiṇa eva hi dharmāḥ na tv anyasya* /

15) PL p.67, l.17; *sva-prakāśātmaṅgikāre tatrāvyāpteḥ* / & PLṬ p.236, ll.12–15; “*mām ahaṁ jñāmi*” *iti ātmanaḥ sva-prakāśatva-darśanāt / sākṣiṇaś cātmatvād iti / evaṁ sva-prakāśātma-rūpa-sākṣi-jñānasya pramāṇa-prāmāṇya-jñānārtham aṅgikāre . . .* /

16) PLṬ p.236, ll.11–12; *tasmāt sākṣi-jñānenaiva sarva-pramāṇa-prāmāṇyam jñāyata* ity *aṅgikāryam* / & PLṬ p.236, ll.4–5; *sākṣiṇo ’prāmāṇye sarva-pramāṇānām prāmāṇyam aprāmāṇikam syāt / prāmāṇya-jñānārtham pramāṇāntarābhāvāt* /

17) *Sākṣin* also proves “non-perception” (*anupalabdhī*) for knowing non-existence. Cf. PLṬ p.220, ll.7–9; *kiṁ cānupalabdher abhāva-gamakatve abhāvavāiśeṣāt anupalabdhy-antarāpekṣety anavasthā syād ity āha “aviśeṣāt” // asmat-pakṣe sva-prakāśa-sākṣi-siddhatvād adoṣaḥ* /

18) VTN p.16, l.10; *na cānubhava-virodha āgamasya prāmāṇyam; āgama-prāmāṇyānubhavasāpy aprāmāṇya-prāpteḥ* / & VTNT p.350, ll.12–17; *sākṣy-anubhava-virodhenaikyāgamasya aprāmāṇyam kuta iti cet, na tāvad viruddhaya ubhayaḥ prāmāṇyam aprāmāṇyam vopapadyata ity uktam / tato ’nyatarasyaivāprāmāṇye ’vaśyam aṅgikaraṇīye na tāvad aikyāgama-virodhena sākṣy-anubhavasya aprāmāṇyam aṅgikartum ucitam / kuta ity ata āha—āgameti / sākṣy-anubhavaḥ khalu sarva-pramāṇa-prāmāṇya-niścāyakaḥ / tathā ca tasya jīveśvara-bheda-viṣaye ’prāmāṇye saty abhedāgama-prāmāṇya-viṣaye ’pi prāmāṇyam aviśvasanīyam syāt / tatas caikyāgama-prāmāṇyam na siddhyet* /

Abbreviations

PL Pramāṇalakṣaṇa of Madhva (aka. Ānandatīrtha). Bannanje Govindacharya, ed. *Sarva-mūla-granthāḥ*. Vol. 5. Bangalore: Akhila Bhārata Mādhva Mahā Maṇḍala Publication, 1974.

PLṬ Pramāṇalakṣaṇatīkā (aka. Nyāyakalpalatā) of Jayatīrtha. P. P. Lakshminārāyana Upādhyāya, ed. *Śrīmadānandatīrthabhagavapādūcāryaviracitāni Daśaprakaraṇāni*. Vol. 1. Bangalore: Sriman Mādhwarāddhānta Samvardhaka Sabhā, 1969.

VTN Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya of Madhva, see PL.

VTNT Viṣṇutattvanirṇayaṭīkā of Jayatīrtha. Bhaṇḍārakerimaṭhādhiśa Śrīśrīvidyāmānyatīrtha, ed,

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