

Indian Christian Philosophizing

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Thinking Along With and Ahead of Richard De Smet

Edited by

John Peter Vallabadoss



Association of Christian Philosophers of India

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INDIAN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHIZING:
Thinking Along With and Ahead of Richard De Smet

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Prof. Richard De Smet, SJ A Mémoire

Joseph Satyanand, IMS

My personal contact with Fr. Richard De Smet dates back to 1972, when I was preparing my B.Th Thesis on ‘The Upaniṣadic Theology of Salvation (*Mokṣa*).’ At that time I had some knowledge of Sanskrit as I had done my *Uttara Madhyamma* in Sanskrit literature from the Sanskrit University of Varanasi. I did my paper under his guidance. At that time Fr. De Smet was in the Department of Philosophy and therefore I did not attend any of his classes in Jnana Deepa, Pune. Except for my B.Th dissertation I did not have any academic contact with Fr. De Smet during my theological studies at Jnana Deepa. He was a specialist in Advaita Vedanta and he enlightened me on various philosophical trends in the Upanishads, which contain the discoveries and spiritual experiences of our ancient sages for a period more than of a thousand years.

After my MA in Vedanta in the Department of Sanskrit, University of Poona I became a life member of the Indian Philosophical Congress (IPC) at the suggestion of Fr. Albert Nambiarparambil, CMI. I attended the Golden Jubilee Session of the IPC at Alwaye in January 1977. Fr. De Smet and Fr. Jean de Marneffe were regular participants at the annual sessions of the IPC and made a very impressive Christian presence at such events. At the Alwaye conference a request was made to institute an endowment lecture on Christian Philosophy at IPC as there are already such endowment lectures on the Buddhist, Jaina, and Swami Narayana sects. It was rejected by the then IPC President. The Christian Philosophers who attend the IPC at Alwaye decided to have an organization of their own and have a separate session during the IPC. That was the beginning of Association of Christian Philosophers in India. Father De Smet was elected the first president of the

Association. In the course of time the Association began to have its own annual session independent of the IPC gathering.

There was an ecumenical meet organized by CBCI at the Christian Ashram in Mussoorie, near Dehradun in the late 70s. I do not remember the year. I had travelled with Fr. De Smet from Delhi to Mussoorie. We went to Shivanand Ashram in Rishiksh, where Fr. De Smet was royally received and the entire Ashram came to listen to him. Swami Shivanand was a friend of Fr. De Smet and held him in high esteem. Fr. De Smet taught me that Ādi Śamkara and St. Thomas Aquinas had similar views on many ontological issues. Their expressions are coloured by their cultural and religious backgrounds.

In 1978 I had registered myself for a PhD programme at Centre of Advanced Studies in Sanskrit, University of Poona. I had opted to study Nimbārka Vedānta as suggested by Mātā Śrī, Gangā Devi of Annatadevi Kanya Gurukul, (Sanskrit College in Shivala), Varanasi. To understand Nimbārka better I studied also other great Ācārya-s and I noticed that in many places Ācārya Śamkara is critiquing the views of Nimbārka. That made me to discuss these and connected issues with Fr. De Smet, at De Nobili College, Pune. I had many sessions with Fr. De Smet. He was extremely helpful. He being a specialist on Śamkara approved my discoveries that one of the Pūrva pakṣins (opponents) of Śamkara is Nimbārka. This is why my thesis was titled Nimbārka, a Pre Samkara Vedāntin and his Philosophy.

When one of my External examiners, Dr. Iswar Krishna Varier of Venkateswara University, Thirupati died in accident, the University of Poona invited Fr. De Smet, a Samkara specialist to be one of my Examiners at the viva for the PhD Defence. Fr. De Smet wanted me to publish my Thesis at the earliest. Unfortunately it was over delayed due to my other responsibilities. But he kept on reminding me the importance of my discoveries for the Vedānta. It took me ten years to publish my Thesis and I sent him a copy before he left India for Europe for medical purposes. I mourn his untimely death in Belgium on 2 March 1997.

Fr. De Smet had great respect for Ācārya Śamkara and his teachings. He found Śamkara not as a monist and illusionist but as a non-dualist and a realist. By reconciling the teachers of Ācārya Śamkara with that of St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. De Smet makes it possible for Christianity to enter into a meaningful dialogue with Indian Religious traditions and to reconcile the West with the East and Christianity with Religions and spiritualities of Indian origin.

Editorial Introduction

Indian Christian Thinking: A Richard De Smetian Way

Association of Christian Philosophers of India has held a series of seminars in the honour of its founding member-president, studying on his contribution to Indian Christian Thinking and on the challenges and prospects for Philosophizing in India Today. Prof. Richard De Smet, has been an inspiring personality as a teacher and a thinker with a difference, blending both Thomistic tradition and Śāṅskrite system of thought, engaging himself fully in the pursuit of Truth, attending various meetings of Indologists and Indian philosophers, besides engaging himself in inter religious dialogue and ecumenical gatherings. He was committed to Indological competence, theoretical discussion, interpersonal encounter, openness to learning from other traditions while being rooted in one's own tradition, avoiding pretension of presupposition-less objectivity in dialogue. His dialogical activity and Indological research paved way for a unique fusion of horizon in Richard De Smet, deepening one's commitment as Indian Christian, engaging in serious reflection on socio-religious-philosophical context of one's country. Hailing his achievements in academic career, being Indologist and Christian philosopher, the ACPI thinks along with him and takes forward his way of thinking. The series of seminars held on-line and on-site, highlighted these two-fold tasks ahead of us, reflecting together as Indian Christian Philosophers.

Richard emerged from Calcutta (Jesuit) School of Indology, taking inspiration from number of thinkers like Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, William Wallace, SJ, Pierre Johanns and Georges Dandoy, J. Putz, J. Bayart, M. Ledrus and C. Bulcke. De Smet himself can be considered another outstanding member of the School. Early from his novitiate, through theological studies at Kurseong in 1946, De Smet had 'Indian-oriented' courses concretely rooted

in Christian tradition and enthusiastically open to the truths and values of Indian traditions. He started reflecting and writing from 1949 onwards on Indian themes. After intensifying his study of Sanskrit his interest in Nyāya, Bhagavad Gītā, Sankara, Ramanuja, he deepened his research culminating in his doctoral thesis at Gregorian University in Rome, with the thesis “The theological method of Śaṅkara,” under the guidance of Frs R. Arnou, SJ and M. Ledrus, SJ. De Smet’s relevance lies in a new interpretation of Śaṅkara as a non-dual realist rather than an acosmic illusionist or a monist. De Smet compared the theory of analogical predication in Śaṅkara with that of Thomas Aquinas, assimilating Śaṅkara’s teaching to the Christian doctrine of creation. De Smet’s fresh interpretation of Śaṅkara puts him in the rank of interpreters of neo-vedantism.

De Smet’s life and works indicate his firm belief and action towards being a dialogical bridge between Indian and Christian traditions, paving way for Inter-philosophical dialogue in ideological encounter between the traditions. His involvement and commitment in understanding and collaborating with others, brought enormous strengths along with his firm rootedness in Christian and Catholic identity with his Thomist background. As founding president of ACPI, he brought in his practical wisdom and insight of reflecting as both Indian and Christian, engaging in serious and creative philosophical discussions on themes related to our context. As a guide and mentor Richard served ACPI till his last breath in 1997. ACPI is honored in thinking along with and ahead of Richard De Smet with our commitment to Indian Christian Philosophizing.

As Indian Christian thinkers while intervening with the Indian Society we have a legitimate right to take a perspective and to develop it. There is a legitimacy, responsibility indebted in our interventions in today’s Indian society. In and through this process of recovering De Smet’s legacy, we too have a commitment to making space in academic circles of Indian philosophical forums. Even though there is a general suspicion arising from a myth that Christianity and Colonialism go together always. Any attempt at dialoguing is met with accusation of being ‘missionary’ of imposing one’s ideas and values. Instead of getting aloof due to that, Indian Christians need to clear this suspicion by associating once again with the academia, demonstrating sincere efforts of being a seeker of Truth. The problem once again, is the insistence of certain authority, *adikāra* in the study and interpretation of the original texts and the thinkers in the Indian traditions. Hardly Indian Christians are experts in such field, unlike Richard De Smet.

Indian Christian Philosophizing pioneering in the project of philosophizing from the double rootedness of Indianness and of being Christian. Even though we have always brought out Christian factor into our discussion on social-critical contexts, yet we need to identify with what is

‘Christian’ clearly and ‘Indian’ in times where these identities are contested. The present volume reflects on this issue of our identity as ‘being Christian’ – what does it mean to be ‘Being Philosopher’ in India. We do live from the very source we love - Jesus who in his life and works have illustrated his critical and social identity, thinking contextually and critically. We live in this Christian terrain, matching Indian social connections.

Johnson Puthenpurackal takes us into the journey beginning with Richard De Smet and the course of its development through his article, ‘Birth and Initial Growth of the ACPI: role of Richard De Smet – A Historico-Reflective Look.’ Being one of the members from its inception the author has reflectively presented ACPI’s commitment to Indian Christian philosophizing initiated by Richard. **Ivo Coelho** in his thought provoking article on ‘Thinking Christianity in India: Richard De Smet’s Contribution and Relevance,’ brings out the vision of the founder and how his legacy makes ACPI move forward in philosophizing. **Keith D’Souza** in his claim of ACPI as emerging school of Socio-critical Theory presents the journey of ACPI in its reflections and publications on various themes related to contextual reflection and critical outlook. We need to be critical, yet any critic has to with be adequate knowledge and moment of tradition. Proposing future prospects for ACPI, the article demonstrates ACPI’s commitment towards Indian Christian Philosophizing.

In his article on ‘Calcutta Jesuit School of Indology: Its Influence upon Richard De Smet,’ **Sean M Doyle** rightly points out the initial enthusiasm De Smet received from this school that became the seeding ground for his later interpretation of Sankara’s Advaita in his own way. Understanding the contextual and theological background of the Calcutta Jesuits provides a deepened dimension to a robust appreciation of the intellectual and scholarly development of Richard De Smet. The article by **Scott Randall Paine** titled ‘Scholia on an Implicit Person: Explorations in Thomism, Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism,’ illustrates the concept of person from three diverse traditions. Analysing the characteristic feature of these traditions on the question of person, as individual, communitarian and cosmic, the author takes us on a conceptual journey to both Western and Eastern traditions, to the metaphysical fountainhead of identifying what we mean by ‘person.’

Jacob Antony and **Sunil Jose** in their capacity as researcher on the philosophy of person by Richard De Smet analyse the concept of *tādātmya* in Śaṅkara, its interpretation by De Smet, Malkovsky and Sara Grant. Rich in ontological framework in non-dualism of Vedānta, the concept of relation brings in complex metaphysical discussion on absolute identity of Brahman and Ātman.

Lourdunathan along with **John Peter** bring out a critical outlook on Richard De Smet’s claim of Śaṅkara more a *śrutivādin*, a theoretician

based on the revealed sacred scriptures, than an abstract reason-oriented philosopher. Illustrating how Richard regarded Śankara as focused on *śruti* as the basis for his thinking, the authors go ahead of Richard in questioning the position of *śruti* in Vedantic tradition with the help of contemporary Indian thinkers like Daya Krishna and Purushottama Bilimoria, in interpreting the *śruti*. The article also argues for a strong space for subaltern reading of *śruti* in contemporary Indian context.

In an attempt to read Indian classical traditions, such as Advaita Vedānta and Śaiva Siddhānta in the light of contemporary sensibilities of Indian Christianity, the last two articles by **Jaison Vadakkan** and **Antony Milton**, deal with need for trustworthy witnesses in disseminating true wisdom and one's choice of a right *Guru*, the master for liberation. Both article discuss the Christian implications of Indian philosophical concepts in both theoretical and practical fields.

We are grateful to ACPI governing body for their support and encouragement to hold a webinar and seminars in two institutes of philosophy on Richard De Smet. The papers presented in those academic gatherings are collected and published as a special series in honor of Richard De Smet. Our immense gratitude goes to all contributors of the article and especially to Dr. Satyanand, IMS to have written a foreword recalling his encounter with Richard as his guide and teacher for enhancing his understanding of Vedanta. Thanks go to the publisher and printer for bringing out the volume elegantly. May the reflections in the book take us forward in our journey of Indian Christian Philosophizing.

Dr. John Peter Vallabadoss, OFM Cap

1

Birth and Initial Growth of the ACPI Role of Richard De Smet - A Historico-Reflective Look

Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap

In this short write-up, I am making an attempt to journey with Prof. De Smet's journeying with the ACPI. De Smet journeying with the ACPI!¹ Was it possible, since there was no ACPI for De Smet to journey with? It was *possible*, because it has become *actual*!² It is true that the ACPI was not already present prior to De Smet's journeying. But as De Smet was creatively and inspiringly journeying, the ACPI came to be!³ This reflection will be primarily a narrative journey with De Smet's journey with the ACPI, and secondly the *narrative* journey will be changed to a *reflective* journey.

1 ACPI is the abbreviation for the 'Association of Christian Philosophers of India,' conceived in 1975 in Delhi, born in 1976 in Alwaye, and registered as a Society in 1989 in Eluru, A.P., India.

2 It is an argument based on common-sense, reiterated by Aquinas that if something is actual, it is a proof that it is possible. If someone managed to jump three meter high, we can conclusively say that it is still possible.

3 Phenomenological way of understanding is used here. In the process of a creative subject existentially relating oneself, reality as such a reality comes to be. The way comes to be as one journeys; the song comes to be as one sings.

1. A Narrative Journey with De Smet's Creative Journey with the ACPI

As a person who has been journeying with Prof. Richard De Smet almost from the beginning of the ACPI,⁴ I shall try to narrate the various significant events on the life-journey of the ACPI. The journey began in 1975 at the Golden Jubilee Annual Session of the '*Indian Philosophical Congress*' (IPC) - the official national organization of the philosophers of India.⁵ As there were many Christian Philosophers in that gathering, the thought emerged - I do not exactly know whether this idea came directly from De Smet or someone else suggested it to him - regarding the starting of an Association for the Christian Philosophers of India. Prof. De Smet, being a regular participant of IPC, was there in Delhi along with a few other Christian philosophers; they were unanimous in their opinion with regard to the need and utility of starting an association for the Indian Christian philosophers. Thus the ACPI was *conceived* at the IPC meeting in Delhi. It was then agreed upon that a definitive decision on and a formal starting of such an association can be had at the next year's IPC meeting to be held at St Joseph Pontifical Seminary, in Alwaye (Kerala).⁶

At the IPC annual seminar held at St Joseph Pontifical Seminary (Alwaye) in 1976 there were present a considerable number of Christian Philosophers due to two reasons: since it was held in a seminary many of the seminary professors were comfortable with the environment, and secondly Prof. De Smet and those present at the Delhi meeting asked many of us to participate in the IPC meetings, especially in Alwaye. Under the leadership of Prof. De Smet those Christian Philosophers who were present at the Alwaye IPC Annual Seminar had several meetings during the free time, and the ACPI was formally started with Prof. Richard De Smet SJ as its Founder-President, and Prof. Albert Nambiaparambil CMI as its secretary, and a few others as Executive Committee members.

When this group of the ACPI was formed in 1976, nobody had even a vague idea as to how it has to be shaped, and what it would turn out to be. All were looking up to Prof. De Smet for guidance. In his practical wisdom, Prof. De Smet suggested that we could start journeying with the IPC for a few years, and then after having learned from them, the ACPI could journey

4 In the 1975 meeting of the '*Indian Philosophical Congress*' in Delhi I was not present, as I was doing my theology at *Jnana Deepa* in Pune after having completed my M.Ph. From 1976 onwards I was a regular participant in the journey of the ACPI.

5 IPC was started by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and R. Tagore, in 1925.

6 It was a wise decision, since one could expect more Christian presence in the IPC meeting held in a Seminary in Kerala, and thus a better decision could be arrived at in such a forum.

beyond IPC. Experience proved that it was a wise suggestion. Accordingly the ACPI members,⁷ while joining the IPC for the annual gatherings, used to have some informal meeting as and when time permitted. This process lasted only for two or three years. It was felt that we could have one or two days of gathering in an adjacent Christian institution, prior to the IPC Annual Seminar. This way of having the ACPI meeting had the twofold advantage for the young Christian Philosophers getting the chance to participate in the IPC meeting, and of making use of the IPC privilege of railway concession. For such gatherings of ours, the questions taken up were mostly from the seminary curriculum, and thus our thought and discussions remained in the confines of seminary perspective of Catholic thinking.

Eventually it was felt that the ACPI should engage itself in more serious and creative philosophical discussions, for which the ACPI had to organize its own annual meetings independently of the IPC at a convenient time and place. Thus the desire to do more serious philosophizing,⁸ marks the beginning of the ACPI having annual meetings of three days, during which short papers were presented on some recurring philosophical themes from the curricula of the Institutes of Philosophy. This too continued for a few years. In 1989 Dr. Varghese Manimala OFM Cap took the lead in getting the ACPI registered as a Society with its statutes, laws and by-laws, and thus it gained a formal look in its functioning and administration. The ACPI membership was opened to the Indian Christians who are involved in philosophical research by way of lecturing and/or publishing on philosophical questions. The Annual Meetings were regularly held with better planning, during which a relevant theme was thoroughly studied by means of research-papers and group-discussions. After having taken the ACPI to this organization level, Prof. Richard De Smet disappeared from the scene in 1997. So great was the empowerment given by its founder-president to the ACPI that it keeps on moving to greater heights! I conclude this narrative journey at this point where Prof. De Smet 'disappears' as an individual person, and 'appears' as a movement of Indian Christian Philosophizing. This takes us to a reflective journeying.

7 In the beginning stages of the Association, there was no strict membership; all those Christian philosophers who used to gather for the meeting were considered members of the ACPI.

8 From the perspective of the disciplined and organized academics of the seminary, the IPC gathering was nothing but a 'picnic' with their family members. Seriousness was very much lacking in discussions; the presentations of the papers were carried out 'for name's sake,' done in a hurry without sufficient time for presentation and discussion.

2. A Reflective Journeying with Prof. De Smet

When the empirical narration of the various events in the life of Prof. De Smet in relation to the birth and the initial growth of the ACPI is replaced with a phenomenological reflection, we begin to *perceive*⁹ the emergence of a movement: *Indian Christian Philosophizing*! This movement was not explicitly present when De Smet was alive; but in the light of the later happenings we can say that the movement of 'Indian Christian Philosophizing' was silently in the offing.

The movement of 'Indian Christian Philosophizing' that has been dormant began to show signs of 'waking up,' such as (1) starting of the *ACPI Publications*, (2) working towards some 'relevant method' for *Indian Christian Philosophizing*, (3) publication of the two-volume *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In 2002 the ACPI, under the leadership of Dr. Johnson Puthenpurackal OFM Cap, took the daring step of publishing the research papers in the form of books. With the starting of the ACPI Publications, the academic rigour and the quality of the papers presented at the annual meetings has shot up; besides, the number of and the enthusiasm among the participants too have considerably increased. Besides, the ACPI gradually occupied a place in the academic map of India!

The academic identity of the ACPI had to be strengthened with its specific way of philosophizing - an *Indian Christian Philosophizing*. In view of evolving a *relevant* method for Indian Christian Philosophizing, the ACPI research seminar in 2003 was exclusively on 'Philosophical Methods,' with the help of an in-depth study of the *prevalent* ones. Since then the ACPI has been collectively convinced of the need to philosophize with a *difference* as Indian Christians. It is the enthusiasm to carry on this journey of philosophizing with greater intensity and velocity that prompted the ACPI to launch another daring project of the two-volume *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which got realized in 2010.

In the phrase, *Indian Christian Philosophizing*, the key-term is 'philosophizing'; the terms 'Indian' and 'Christian' are adjectives, qualifying the 'how' of the philosophizing. Though the term 'philosophizing' is not of any recent origin, it is becoming in recent times more widespread in its being used in philosophical circles, in comparison to the more popular term 'philosophy.' This change is not a terminological change of one term (philosophizing) replacing another term (philosophy). There is a basic difference between 'philosophy' and 'philosophizing' in their meaning and content. The term 'philosophy' is nominal in its structure, static and dead in its meaning, and refers to the finished product of thought, while the term

⁹ I am using this term 'perceive' in the phenomenological sense of '*perceiving with one's consciousness*,' as different from the empirical-experience with the external senses.

'philosophizing' is verbal in its structure, dynamic and alive in its meaning, and refers to the process of thinking. The term 'philosophy' presupposes a perennially and universally valid truth. Contemporary thought pattern has destroyed such a myth,¹⁰ and has opted for a more humble attitude. The term 'philosophizing' reflects such a philosophical humility of being constantly in search, taking serious consideration of the elements of time and space.¹¹ Thus *philosophizing* is and has to be different according to the different places, times and perspectives. In the context of this study, the meaning of '*philosophizing*' will concretely show itself in relation to our twofold perspectives of being *Indian* and *Christian*, specifying the 'how' of philosophizing. The process of 'philosophizing' is not an intellectual journey, building up a conceptually well-developed edifice, but a reflective journey, giving thought to existential questions of social relevance.¹² Such a philosophizing is carried out, not exclusively by one's 'head' or intellect, but by the whole person, encompassing 'head,' 'heart,' and 'hands.'¹³ Thus the ACPI has been philosophizing by way of giving personally involved reflection on existentially gripping questions.

What do the terms '*Indian*' and '*Christian*' mean? If these are taken as *nouns*, they refer to the 'dead labels' attached to one's being the members of the two groups; as *adjectives* these terms challenge one to the process of *becoming*. The noun *stagnates*, the adjective *challenges*; the noun is *static*, the adjective is *dynamic*; the noun speaks of the *dead* factuality, the adjective reminds of the *live* possibility; the noun refers only to one's *being* (what one is *already*), the adjective to one's '*becoming*'—the constant process of moving from the *already* to the *not-yet*. We take the terms '*Indian*' and '*Christian*' in the dynamic and challenging dimension.

Standing rooted in the twofold rich heritage of being *Indian* and *Christian*, the ACPI has been, with its philosophizing with a difference, moving towards *becoming* Indian and Christian. Thus the 'whence' and the 'whither' of this philosophizing is the same: from its givenness of being

¹⁰ In the postmodern thought the *myth* of dogmatism and absolute certainty got crumbled, as a result of which philosophy today is less presumptuous and more humble. For a concise consideration of 'postmodernism', cf. *The Postmodern...A Siege of the Citadel of Reason*, edited by Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Delhi: Media House, 2002).

¹¹ Cf., Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, "Editorial," *Vijnanadipti*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 2004): 123.

¹² The list of themes of the ACPI Annual Seminars is indicative of the existential 'tone' in the ACPI research process.

¹³ The present author, while giving thought to my way of thinking, presented it as a process of thinking with head, heart and hands. Cf. George Panthanmackel, ed., *Authentic Existence: A Philosophical Probe*, 471-94 (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2012).

Indian and *Christian*, the ACPI in its philosophizing has been journeying towards its goal of being *Indian* and *Christian*; the ACPI is now at its never-ending hermeneutical process of moving from the *already* to the *not-yet* of being *Indian* and *Christian*.

Thus what started as a humble venture with fumbling steps has grown to be a movement of philosophizing, giving a momentum to the research potential of the growing community of Christian philosophers in India. The little ‘spark’ that emerged from Prof. De Smet was kept alive and has been kindled into a bright ‘flame’ of a philosophical movement by a small group of pioneers of the ACPI. With the newly triggered enthusiasm for philosophizing with a difference, the ACPI has the potential to explore the ‘unexplored’ realms of socio-philosophical relevance.

2

Thinking Christianity in India **Richard De Smet’s Contribution and Relevance**

Ivo Coelho, SDB

It is wonderful that ACPI is honouring its founding president with a series of webinars, and I am happy and privileged to be part of it. In this article I will only concentrate on Richard De Smet’s contribution to thinking Christianity in India. I have taken the liberty to speak of ‘thinking Christianity in India’ as a way of covering both philosophizing and theologizing. As De Smet himself has pointed out, the distinction between philosophy and theology arose from within the bosom of Christian theologizing, and any transposition into an Indian context is bound to be complex. Further, what was a distinction degenerated eventually into a separation, which makes things even more complicated. I believe that the distinction is important but that the separation needs to be overcome, recognizing that we philosophize – and theologize – on the basis of all that we are.¹

1. The Calcutta School of Indology

No great thinker or scholar emerges out of the blue. Richard De Smet emerged from the bosom of the relatively unknown Calcutta (Jesuit) School of Indology.² The Calcutta School of Indology took its inspiration from the

1 See Ivo Coelho, “A New Relationship between Philosophy and Theology,” *Jnanodaya: Journal of Philosophy* [Yercaud – India] 16 (2009), 19-38.

2 See Joseph Mattam, “Interpreting Christ to India Today: The Calcutta School,” *Indian Journal of Theology* 23/3-4 (July 1974), 101-205, and <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/>

Catholic convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. William Wallace, SJ, himself a convert from Anglicanism, was impressed by Upadhyay's attempt to Indianize Christianity, and urged his Belgian Jesuit province to set aside gifted men for the study of Hindu texts. Among the results of this vision were stalwarts like Pierre Johanns and Georges Dandoy, co-founders of the innovative monthly *The Light of the East*.

Pierre Johanns, SJ (1882-1955) was probably the leading light of the Calcutta school. He has been called the most systematic and creative Roman Catholic missionary thinker of the early twentieth century.³ Johanns' work on the Vedānta, now available in book form, was first published as a series of 146 articles in *The Light of the East*, and is still unique in the sense that, while Christian scholars have dedicated themselves to the study of one or other Vedāntin, Johanns still remains the only one to have given attention to the three major strands of Vedānta—Śaṅkara's *advaita*, Rāmānūja's *viśiṣṭādvaita*, and Vallabha's *śuddhādvaita*. Besides Wallace, Johanns and Dandoy, other members of the School were J. Putz, J. Bayart,⁴ M. Ledrus and C. Bulcke.⁵ Obviously, De Smet himself can be considered another outstanding member of the School.

ijt/23_3-4_191.pdf. See also "The Calcutta School of Indology" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Calcutta_School_of_Indology as of 7 March 2011.

- 3 O.V. Jathanna, "Foreword," *To Christ through the Vedanta: The Writings of P. Johanns*, ed. Theo de Greeff, vol. 1 (Bangalore: United Theological College, 1996) xiv, cited in Sean Doyle, *Synthesizing the Vedanta: The Theology of Pierre Johanns S.J.* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 333-4. The Belgian Jesuit Pierre Scheuer, whom De Smet has called a prince among metaphysicians (see De Smet, "Surrounded by Excellence: An Evocation," *Jivan: Jesuits of South Asia: Views and News* 11/10 [December 1990] 10) said that Johanns was the brightest student he had ever had (Doyle 63). The external examiner at Oxford remarked that "only once in a century can you find an intelligence of this type" (Doyle 27; also R. De Smet, "Foreword," *Religious Hinduism*, ed. R. De Smet and J. Neuner, 4th rev. ed. [Mumbai: St Pauls, 1997] 19). To evaluate his dissertation on 'The *Intellectus Agens* in Western and Eastern Philosophy,' Oxford could provide no suitable examiners and had to have recourse to Cambridge; it was the Cambridge man who made the remark cited above. (De Smet refers to a doctoral dissertation, whereas Doyle says it was towards a Bachelor of Literature degree.)
- 4 R. De Smet, Review of F. X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*, now published in Richard De Smet, *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013) ch. 28. *Understanding Śaṅkara* will henceforth be referred to as *US*.
- 5 See the Preface to R. V. De Smet, 'The Theological Method of Śaṅkara,' doctoral dissertation under the guidance of R. Arnou, SJ (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1953), xi+370 pp, unpublished.

2. Richard De Smet: The Emergence of the Indologist

Most of what I have to say about the life of Richard Vital De Smet is available in my article published in *Mission Today* (2011) and in *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* (2012).⁶ Let me begin by making a few remarks about De Smet's early interest in indology. Already during the two years of his novitiate, De Smet studied Pierre Johanns' "penetrating study of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Vallabha." When doing theology at Kurseong in 1946, De Smet found his theology courses 'India-oriented': the chief professors were Frs Joseph Putz, SJ⁷ and Julian Bayart, SJ had a solid indological competence, which helped them teach a theology that was concretely open to the truths and values of the religions of India. The ecumenical disposition was also 'formally cultivated,' far before the word became popular. De Smet recalls a seminar which studied the evangelizing forces at work outside the Catholic church, and another that studied the relationship of the world to the Absolute according to Śaṅkarācārya.⁸ Among his own papers are to be found an unpublished manuscript, "A Note on Śaṅkara's Doctrine of Creation," dated 13 June 1949,⁹ and another entitled "Upadhyay's Interpretation of Śaṅkara," Kurseong, Ascension Day, 1949.¹⁰

- 6 Ivo Coelho, "Richard V. De Smet, SJ (1916-1997): A Life," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 23/1 (2012) 1-72. Henceforth Coelho, "A Life." All the matter in this section has been drawn from this source. See also Ivo Coelho, "Richard V. De Smet, SJ: A Bibliography," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 20/1 [2009] 109-157 = Ivo Coelho, "Richard V. De Smet, SJ: A Bibliography," *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010] 226-272. Henceforth this bibliography will be referred to as CB.
- 7 See in this light De Smet's contribution to a *Festschrift* in honour of Putz: "Highlights of the Life of Faith (Śraddha) in India," *God's Word Among Men: Essays in Honour of J. Putz, S.J.*, ed. G. Gispert-Sauch (Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1973), 39-58 (CB n 365).
- 8 De Smet, 'The Trajectory of My Dialogical Activity,' autobiographic text for Bradley Malkovsky, 23 April 1991 (13 pp. typescript) 4. Compare instead the report of another Jesuit missionary, Joseph Neuner, from about the same time: "I landed in Bombay on 29th May '38. It really was a new world—and still in many ways it was the old one, because theology in India at that time was taught in exactly the same way as in Europe: in Latin, with western textbooks and the common syllabus that was followed all over the world. This, in fact, was for me the only possibility to survive. I had no preparation for my job but the ordinary training in theology—I did the doctorate only after the war—I just had to cope with the pressure of daily work. More and more, however, I felt uncomfortable: these studies had no direct connection with the Indian situation and were not related to the spiritual and intellectual tradition of the nation of which I too, knew very little." See J. Neuner, "'A Readiness to Reach Out from Stabilized Positions to Uncharted Reality,'" *Jivan: Jesuits of South Asia: Views and News* 11/10 (December 1990), 10.
- 9 See R. De Smet, Collected Papers D, 7-23 (JDV library) (CB n 323) = appendix 2 of *US*.
- 10 R. De Smet, Collected Papers D, 1-6 (CB n 27).

De Smet was ordained 21 November 1948, probably during the final year of theology. At the end of theological studies, the young scholastic was asked to prepare himself to teach philosophy at the soon to be opened centre at Pune. He therefore intensified his study of Sanskrit in Calcutta with a group of eminent Jesuit indologists: G. Dandoy, whom we have mentioned already; R. Antoine, who held a master's degree in Sanskrit from the Calcutta University; P. Fallon who knew not only Sanskrit but also Bengali.¹¹ Antoine and Fallon had started the first dialogue centre, Shanti Bhavan, in Calcutta (De Smet says he 'shared' in that venture for a while in 1950).¹² On advice from Dandoy, De Smet began—after barely a few months of Sanskrit—to 'cut his teeth' on Nyāya. He went on to translate the Bhagavad Gītā and its commentary by Śāṅkara, and, six months later, Rāmānuja's *Śrī Bhāṣya*. An amazingly bold method of learning a classical language, and certainly an inspiration for us who are Indian by birth!¹³ In Kurseong and Calcutta we find, therefore, a constellation of teachers who influenced De Smet.

The topic chosen for the doctoral thesis was clear: the theological method of Śāṅkara. But so was the place: the doctorate had to be done in Rome, at the Gregorian University of the Jesuits, despite difficulties in obtaining the relevant literature and competent guides.¹⁴ De Smet

11 "Depuis mon arrivé en Inde au début de 1946, je me suis tourné à la fois vers les hommes et vers les livres, vers les hommes que le Seigneur m'envoyait rencontrer et vers les livres qui me permettaient de jeter vers eux des ponts qui ne fussent pas excessivement précaires. Cette voie d'approche m'était tracée par des hommes remarquables, un Pierre Johanns, un George Dandoy, un Pierre Fallon, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns, et elle avait été frayée par Robert de Nobili, le premier Européen sans doute qui arriva à pénétrer dans les arcanes de la littérature sanscrite et à s'imprégner de la sagesse brahmanique." De Smet, "Le dialogue vivifié par les textes," *Rythmes du Monde* 15/3-4 (1967), 197.

12 R. De Smet, "Surrounded by Excellence: An Evocation," *Jivan: Jesuits of South Asia: Views and News* 11/10 (December 1990) 11. He seems to have kept up contact with Shanti Bhavan: see the unpublished "Some Problems of Scholastic and Vedānta Philosophy," abstract of lecture given on 8 February 1959 at a meeting of Darshana Cakra, Shanti Bhavan, Calcutta, 1 page typescript, Collected Papers A, 142 = DNC 73/DES/COL 142 (CB n 95).

13 De Smet, 'Trajectory' 4. See Ivo Coelho, "Fr. Richard V. De Smet (1916-97): Reminiscences," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 8/1 (1997) 8: 'I studied Sanskrit under Antoine in Calcutta for a year—six months picking up the script, six months the language. You fellows, with your knowledge of Marathi, you should be able to do it in six months' time. Śāṅkara's Sanskrit is not difficult. It is like Thomas' Latin. I picked up enough Sanskrit to be able to read Śāṅkara. I can't manage the high literature, but what I know is enough for my purposes.'

14 All Jesuits had at that time to do their doctorate at the Gregorian. See Coelho, "Reminiscences" 8: 'I went to the Greg. and finished the doctorate in two years. When I asked for some books to be sent me from India, the provincial refused, saying that it was too costly. Finally I got them through Fr. Antoine.'

concentrated on Śāṅkara, reading, summarizing and annotating the Sanskrit texts of all his authentic works, putting his early philological training to good use. The thesis, done under the guidance of Frs R. Arnou, SJ and M. Ledrus, SJ, was defended in April 1953, and received the highest grade.¹⁵ But in 1994 De Smet would complain:

In 1953, when I was vindicating the fact that the method of Śāṅkara was exclusively commentarial (a fact wilfully ignored by Radhakrishnan and other modernistic Indian professors) I called this method 'theological,' thus hinting that comparative theology might be fruitful and meaningful. When, however, I devoted one chapter of my PhD dissertation to a formal analysis of the polysemy of terms-in-context as familiar to Jaimini and Śāṅkara as much as to Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians, my Gregorian University examiners were seized with timidity and asked me not to include that in the published thesis. What had stood to reason to a Calcutta Jesuit because he was heir to an inter-faith approach initiated by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and ably practised by the Bengal Jesuits W. Wallace, P. Johanns, G. Dandoy, J. Putz, J. Bayart (to mention only the most prominent up to that date) was still unexplored and seemed risky in the Rome of the last days of Pius XII.¹⁶

Apart from the comments about the atmosphere in Rome at the time of his doctoral studies, it is interesting that De Smet sees himself and the 'Calcutta School' of Catholic indologists as heirs to the approach initiated by Upadhyay. As I have hinted already, I would have no hesitation in adding De Smet to the illustrious ranks of Jesuit indologists, beginning with De Nobili in the seventeenth century and including the impressive group he was fortunate to have as his teachers, mentors and inspirers in and around Calcutta.¹⁷ De Smet, in J. Lipner's judgment, was responsible for consolidating, developing and 'objectifying,' in the sense of giving a theologically non-tendentious ring, to this approach. "As such, he was immensely influential

15 See Jean de Marneffe, "Richard De Smet, S.J.," *Interrelations and Interpretation: Philosophical Reflections on Science, Religion and Hermeneutics in Honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J.*, ed. Job Kozhamthadam (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997), xviii.

16 De Smet, "From Catholic Theology to Śāṅkara Vedānta and Return with Fr F. X. Clooney," review article: Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 58 (1994), 795-796 = ch. 28 of *US*.

17 Julius Lipner, "Richard V. De Smet, S.J.—An Appreciation by Julius Lipner," *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 11 (1998), 54 note 3.

for the subsequent methodology of Catholic indological study and research in India—a tradition that thrives today with a number of first-rate scholars on the world stage.”¹⁸ Lipner acknowledges his own indebtedness to De Smet for his research on Śaṅkara. B. J. Malkovsky reports that, as a result of the circulation of De Smet’s doctoral thesis, many have been persuaded that Śaṅkara is a *śrutivādin* rather than a pure philosopher.¹⁹ Among these may be counted F. X. Clooney, K. Satchidananda Murty and Anantanand Rambachan.²⁰

3. Studies on De Smet

The inaccessibility and non-availability of De Smet’s writings has often been noted. Malkovsky observes: “Unfortunately, his writings, the great majority of which were published in India, have never been as accessible to a broad western readership as have the works of other European Christian thinkers of his generation who chose India as their new homeland, such seminal figures as Swami Abhishiktananda... and Dom Bede Griffiths.... Nor is much known in the West about De Smet’s life in general.”²¹

An important explanation for this situation lies in two important decisions that De Smet took at the very beginning of his scholarly career. He reports these in typical Jesuit fashion:

[W]ould I write the kind of works which would satisfy my individual inclinations (especially for pieces of indological research for which the organs of publication existed mainly outside India) or would I rather obey the requests which would arise inside India from my dialogical activity? If I chose the latter, would I give preference to the requests of Christians or to those of Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, etc. From each of these two doubts, I chose the second alternative. Two consequences have followed from this decision. The first is that most of my production consists of occasional pieces: seminar papers, articles concerning imposed themes, contributions to Felicitation or Commemoration Volumes, chapters provided for books according to the desires of their editors, articles requested by editors of encyclopedias (The

18 Lipner, “Appreciation” 53. For some parts of the paragraph, see *ibid.* 52-53.

19 See Malkovsky, “Introduction” 5. See also Bradley J. Malkovsky, “In Memoriam: Richard De Smet, S.J. (1916-1997),” *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 10 (1997), 3.

20 See De Smet, “From Catholic Theology to Śaṅkara Vedanta and Return with Fr F. X. Clooney” 807 = *US* 411.

21 Malkovsky, “Introduction” 1.

Telugu Encyclopedia, The Marathi Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Enciclopedia Luso-Brasileira de Cultura).²²

In the last two decades we have seen the emergence of a small group of committed De Smet scholars: besides Malkovsky himself, we could mention Giri K. John, Scott Randall Paine, Daniel J. Soars and Jacob Palaparambil.²³ To this may be added my own project of making De Smet’s works more readily available, with the publication of *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), *Understanding Sankara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013), and *Guidelines in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2022).²⁴ I have also two articles on De Smet: “From Person to Subject: Lonergan’s Methodical Transposition as Upper Blade for Reading Sankara,” *Lonergan Workshop* 23, and “Retrieving Good Work: De Smet on Sankara,” *Lonergan Workshop* 24, besides the already mentioned life of De Smet.

Two *Festschriften* that were being planned for De Smet were both, unfortunately, ready only after his death in 1997. The first, which honoured De Smet together with his friend and colleague Jean de Marneffe, was edited

22 De Smet, ‘Trajectory’ 13. The typescript available to me ends abruptly here. See also De Smet, “Interphilosophical and Religious Dialogue” 1-2: “I had decided not to pursue my own preferred interests but to be available to any demand made by non-Christians, or also by non-Catholic Christians, for lectures, courses, articles, contributions to special volumes, etc., and thus to publish mainly in the Indian non-Catholic periodicals and other press organs.” And Coelho, “Reminiscences” 8: “Back in Pune after the doctorate, De Smet found himself burdened with a heavy load of teaching, leaving very little time for writing. He had to find time to pursue his vocation as a writer. ‘I had to make an option to be a writer. I was teaching the whole of Indian philosophy. But I made the option to write. Then I had to choose, whether to write for christian scholars or for Indian scholars at large. I chose to write for the latter. That is why I am not known much to our Indian theologians.’”

23 Giri K. John, *Brahmajijñāsā of Śaṅkara as Theology: A Post Colonial Appraisal* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2013); Scott Randall Paine, “Bernard Kelly, Richard De Smet and the Dialogue between Thomas Aquinas and Advaita Vedanta,” *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 30/2 (2019), 205-222; Daniel J. Soars, *Beyond the Dualism of Creature and Creator A Hindu-Christian Theological Inquiry into the Distinctive Relation between the World and God* (Doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.50569>), and *The World and God are Not-Two: A Hindu-Christian Conversation* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming); Jacob Palaparambil, Richard De Smet’s Discovery of the Notion of Person in Adi Sankaracarya’s Advaita Vedanta (PhD dissertation, Salesian Pontifical University, Rome, 2022); and Yadhu Michael, working in Banaras Hindu University on De Smet’s interpretation of Sankara’s Advaitavāda.

24 Richard De Smet, *Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2022). Henceforth *GIP*.

by Job Kozhamthadam, SJ with the title *Interrelations and Interpretation*.²⁵ The other, under the care of Malkovsky, was turned into a commemorative volume entitled *New Perspectives in Advaita Vedanta*.²⁶ Each of these volumes contains bibliographies of the works of De Smet, the former with 288 items, and the latter with 484 items.²⁷ Recently I myself have added a third, more complete bibliography, arranged chronologically, containing 757 primary and 40 secondary sources.²⁸

De Smet's output may be scattered and occasional, but it is extensive and formidable. J. Vattanky allowed himself to say that De Smet "was probably the most scholarly and most research-oriented professor any Catholic seminary has produced in the last fifty years."²⁹

4. Contribution and Relevance

4.1. Indological Achievements

De Smet's relevance lies first of all in his Indological scholarship. Scholars tend to agree that De Smet's two major indological achievements are, first, a new interpretation of Śaṅkara as a non-dual realist rather than an acosmic illusionist, and second, his clarification regarding the personhood of Brahman.³⁰

A New Interpretation of Śaṅkara: In the course of his doctoral research, De Smet discovered a doctrine of analogical predication in Śaṅkara that bore astounding similarities to that of Thomas Aquinas.³¹ In the early student essays of 1949 mentioned above, we find De Smet, under the influence of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, assimilating Śaṅkara's teaching to the Christian doctrine of creation, and regarding *māyā* and *vivartavāda* as Śaṅkara's

25 Job Kozhamthadam, ed., *Interrelations and Interpretation: Philosophical Reflections on Science, Religion and Hermeneutics in Honour of Richard De Smet*, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J. (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997).

26 Bradley J. Malkovsky, ed., *New Perspectives in Advaita Vedanta: Essays in Commemoration of Professor Richard De Smet, SJ*. (Leiden / Boston / Köln: Brill, 2000).

27 The Kozhamthadam bibliography lists 8 books, 222 articles, and 58 reviews, while the Malkovsky bibliography lists 6 books, 399 articles, and 76 reviews.

28 Ivo Coelho, "Richard V. De Smet, SJ: A Bibliography," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 20/1 (2009), 109-157 = Ivo Coelho, "Richard V. De Smet, SJ: A Bibliography," *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), 226-272.

29 John Vattanky, "Fr Richard De Smet, S.J.: Friend, Scholar, Man of Dialogue," *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection* 71/4 (2007), 245.

30 Malkovsky, "Introduction" 13. Also Vattanky 251, 254.

31 See De Smet, 'The Theological Method of Śaṅkara,' ch. IX, 5, d, "The Interpretation of the Vedic Definitions (*lakṣaṇas*) of Brahman" (268 ff).

ways of holding on to the unchangeability of Brahman as well as to the participated and entirely dependent existence of the world. Śaṅkara is, for him, neither monist nor 'theopanist' (a variation of 'pantheist').³²

In his doctoral dissertation, despite his discovery of a theory of indirect indication in Śaṅkara, and while rejecting a pantheist interpretation, De Smet reverts to the standard interpretation of Śaṅkara as acosmist— Influenced perhaps by Johanns and Dandoy.³³ It is only in 1964 that we find a first indication of a decisive rejection of the *māyāvāda* interpretation.³⁴ The 'Guidelines in Indian Philosophy' reflect a certain ambiguity, but by the time De Smet arrives at the last chapter on Śaṅkara, we find him clearly affirming his new interpretation of the master as a non-dualist rather than a monist, who upholds the entirely relative reality of the world in complete ontological dependence on the supreme Brahman.³⁵ The long discussion on the causality of Brahman in these notes is expanded and enriched by a pair of articles on creation in the following years that draw from both Śaṅkara and Aquinas, finding a surprising degree of similarity in the teachings of these two great teachers.³⁶

In the years that followed, De Smet sharpened these discoveries and sought more evidence for them, in the context of his ongoing dialogue with indologists and philosophers over the length and breadth of India. The upshot of his claim was that Śaṅkara was no world-denying monist, but rather a non-dualist, one who held the radical non-separateness of Brahman and world, and a realist in the sense that he affirmed the entirely dependent reality of world on its supreme Cause, Brahman. In the process, he was led to present to his interlocutors not only his fresh interpretation of Śaṅkara, but also a proper understanding of the Christian doctrine of creation, especially as proposed by a man of sharp theological acumen and metaphysical insight such as Thomas Aquinas. For creation is not to be understood in an anthropomorphic sense as an act or an event taking place at a particular time; rather, it is to be understood in terms of the category of relation, the relation of radical ontological dependence of world on God. This relation, De Smet explained, was understood by Thomas as real on the side of creatures but merely logical on the side of God, and went on to show that this was not very different from Śaṅkara when he says: "Names and

32 See De Smet, "Upadhyay's Interpretation of Śaṅkara" and "A Note about Śaṅkara's Doctrine of Creation," *US* appendices 1 and 2.

33 See De Smet, 'The Theological Method of Śaṅkara' 344.

34 See De Smet, "Śaṅkara's Non-Dualism (*Advaita-Vāda*) (1964/68)," *US* ch. 3.

35 See De Smet, 'Guidelines in Indian Philosophy' 221, 231, 277, 293.

36 See De Smet, "Śaṅkara and Aquinas on Creation" and "Origin: Creation and Emanation," *US* chs. 23 and 26.

forms in all their states have their *ātman* in *brahman* alone, but *brahman* has not its *ātman* in them.”³⁷

De Smet’s fresh interpretation of Śaṅkara “is presently unveiling hitherto unexpected points of contact” between Advaitic nondualist and Christian theistic points of view.³⁸ It also, according to me, carries classical interpretations such as those of Radhakrishnan and Mahadevan along the direction of their pointing. For while both these eminent scholars do use of the language of illusion, they are also clear that for Śaṅkara the world is by no means *atyanta asat* like the son of a barren woman.³⁹ De Smet’s discovery of analogical predication in Śaṅkara, together with its implications for the causality and creatorship of Brahman, actually serves to integrate the deepest intentions of people like Radhakrishnan and Mahadevan.

The Personhood of Brahman: As for the personhood of Brahman, De Smet’s strategy was to work out the development of the notion of person in Western thought, and to use that development as an upper blade in his study of Indian thought. He pointed out that the notion of person was adopted and adapted by Christian theologians so as to be applicable primarily to the divine mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation; only subsequently was it applied also to human beings created in God’s image. He showed how Boethius’ definition underwent deepening and refinement at the hands of Thomas Aquinas. He also showed how Thomas’ holistic and organic notion of person degenerated into atomic individualism in the modern age of the West. It was in this context of the ‘loss of the person’ that a German philosopher, F. H. Jacobi, decided to restrict the use of ‘person’ to human beings. This decision affected the great translators of the Sanskrit works, who opted to render *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* as personal and impersonal respectively. Once all this is properly understood, however, it becomes clear that the highest Brahman of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta is nothing if not personal.⁴⁰

37 *Taitt. Up. Bh.* 2.6.1; also *B.S.Bh.* 2.1.9. See Malkovsky, “Introduction” 16-17. For a more extensive treatment of De Smet’s developing interpretation of Śaṅkara, see Ivo Coelho, “Introduction,” *US*.

38 Malkovsky, “Advaita Vedanta and Christian Faith” 409.

39 See “Fr. Ivo Coelho: Applying Lonergan’s Method: A Dialectic of Some Interpretations of Śaṅkara,” <http://lonerganwebsite.blogspot.com>, entry of 15 November 2007.

40 No less a scholar and Vedāntin than T.M.P. Mahadevan admitted at a public seminar that the Brahman was nothing if not personal. Interestingly, De Smet calls this an important linguistic change, and I am beginning to realize that it is just that: a linguistic change. For true change, the whole system and context needs to change, for it is within the system that words and terms acquire their meaning. See Richard De Smet, *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010) 118.

4.2. Relevance for Indian Christian Theology

One of the consequences of the decision to give preference to requests by Hindus, etc. is that De Smet’s work is not really known to Indian theologians. This fact was brought home to me while speaking with one of my teachers and a good friend, a well-known figure in Indian theological circles and a very well-read person. We were talking about how Śaṅkara could probably provide better categories for understanding the Trinity than Aristotle. I had taken for granted that my friend knew about De Smet’s work, and I happened to mention it in passing. To my great surprise, it turned out to be a revelation to him. It would be interesting to trace the history of the reception of De Smet’s work, both among Indian Christian theologians and among indologists in general.⁴¹

De Smet’s two important Indological achievements are not only important in the dialogue with Hinduism but also provide Indian categories for a Christian theology.

In this context, we might note one explicitly theological piece: “Towards an Indian Christology” of 1965.⁴² De Smet also gave lectures in the Faculty of Theology of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth on specifically religious topics in Hinduism such as sacrifice, sacraments and ethics.⁴³

Dialogical Style: Malkovsky calls De Smet “one of the twentieth century’s giants in Hindu-Christian dialogue”⁴⁴ and “a leading participant in the theological and philosophical encounter between Hinduism and Christianity.”⁴⁵ Years before Vatican II could acknowledge the need for understanding and collaboration with people of other religions, De Smet was “reaching out to the mystery of God active in others.” Decades before

41 See Coelho, “Reminiscences” 8-9.

42 “Towards an Indian Christology,” *The Clergy Monthly Supplement* 7/6 (1965), 254-260. A note on p. 254 describes this paper as a shortened and slightly improved version of a paper read at the Nagpur session of the Indian Christian Theological Association, 22-24 March 1965. The paper was reprinted as “Materials for an Indian Christology” in *Religion and Society* 12 (1965), 6-15.

43 De Smet, ‘Trajectory’ 6. See, e.g., R. De Smet, *The Sacraments (Samskaras) of Hinduism: A Comparative Study*. Notes for Students, 50 pp., n.d. but post-1934: see Introductory note: “There exists no published theological comparative study of Samskaras and Christian Sacraments. I could, however, use an unpublished *De Sacramentis* of M. Ledrus, S.J. (Kurseong, 1934) which contains elements of such comparative study.” I am grateful to G. Gispert-Sauch both for pointing out this item, and for supplying me with a copy: see his “Review Article [of *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho, Delhi: MLBD, 2013]: The Theological Legacy of Fr Richard De Smet, S.J.” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 77 (2013), 468-478.

44 Malkovsky, “In Memoriam” 3.

45 Malkovsky, “Preface,” *New Perspectives in Advaita Vedānta* vii.

the 34th Jesuit General Congregation endorsed Pope Paul VI's declaration that dialogue was a new way of being Church, he was seeking "to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity."⁴⁶ In De Smet's own memorable words, he was a hyphen-priest: "I tried to become a hyphen-priest, hyphening between the Catholic Church and our 'converging brethren', whether Protestants, Orthodox, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Muslims, atheists and even some Russian and East German communists."⁴⁷

De Smet brought to dialogue *enormous personal strengths*. His outgoing nature and active compassion are more than evident in his memories of life in the German concentration camp Stalag XVII B. The same compassion and sense of solidarity made him, scholar of international reputation, spend an hour every evening walking with the poor children of the locality, telling them stories, playing games and showing tricks, besides appealing to his relatives, friends and benefactors for the many concrete needs of these 'young friends' and their families.⁴⁸ Compassion and concern were accompanied by an ability to be at ease with people and to put them at ease. At the same time he was also bold, self-possessed, confident, not easily threatened: in the camp he was leader as well as negotiator, and he could walk up to the Commandant to demand the rights of prisoners. Boldness did not lead to arrogance, nor did standing up for rights lead to contempt: he was able to appreciate not only the Austrian chaplain in the camp but also the German officer Notz.

46 Patrick Vincent, "Friend, Scholar and Man of Dialogue: Father Richard De Smet, SJ. 14 April 1916 – 2 March 1997," *Jivan: Jesuits of South Asia: Views and News* 18/5 (May-June 1997), 23.

47 De Smet, "Surrounded by Excellence" 11.

48 See Joseph A. D'Souza, "Father Richard De Smet: A Personal Appreciation," *Calcutta Jesuit Newsletter* (April 1997), cited by Lipner, "Appreciation" 53. See also Coelho, "Reminiscences" 6. We are in possession of four of the 'letters of appeal': see CB nn 68, 128, 161, 231. There is a fifth which I am trying to trace (see CB n 486), and no doubt other such letters in the possession of the friends, benefactors and relatives. All of them seem to contain not only brief reports about De Smet's academic and dialogical activities and general comments about the Indian situation, but also descriptions of the concrete needs of people, and humble recognition of the more privileged situation of 'poor religious' like himself:

Notre situation à nous et à nos étudiants est forcément plus stable et, malgré notre vœu de pauvreté, nous ne paraissions pas pauvres aux yeux de ces vrais pauvres. Souvent j'en suis honteux et de ce dont je puis disposer je donne les bribes que je peux. Même un bonbon que l'on me donne peut être partagé en quatre et faire quatre petits enfants heureux pour une minute. Leur sourire est une plus grande récompense que ce que mon acte mérite. Mais les plus grands ont besoin de cahiers, de crayons, même de crayons à billes si pas de réservoirs, et ça c'est plus difficile à procurer dans les limites de l'obéissance et de la pauvreté religieuses. (CB n 128, 701).

Another marked characteristic of De Smet was his *strong religious identity*: he was rooted and centred in Christ,⁴⁹ and he did not manifest any need to react to past or present authority. The personal strengths were matched by a *solid philosophical, theological and indological preparation*. Fr Debauche and constellations of extraordinary teachers had instilled in him a Christianity that was humbly aware of its own strengths as well as limitations but also appreciative of and keenly open to other cultures and religions. A precocious mind, keen personal interest and a capacity for hard work led to a deepening interest and competence in indological matters. But he was far from being the narrow scholar. We recall his early interest in poetry; his surprising acquaintance not only with Newman but also with Lonergan, Gadamer, Ricoeur; his keenness for archaeology and history. He was a *uomo universale*, a 'generalist' rather than merely a specialist.⁵⁰

All these qualities stood him in good stead when faced with personal attacks such as that of Dr Chubb at Kandy: personal competence but also charm and self-possession soon turned the attacker into a good friend and defender. The great demand for him from the most diverse academic and religious quarters in the subsequent half century of his activity in India is further evidence in this line. I myself have heard that scholars at the various meetings he attended would vie with one another to touch his feet, and one of them even went so far as to call him one of the Vedāntins of India.⁵¹

De Smet exemplified Panikkar's recommendation that true dialogue has no place for an *époché*:⁵² he never hid his Christian and Catholic identity, and his Thomist background. Unlike much contemporary dialogue—or

49 Vincent 24.

50 See Coelho, "Reminiscences" 7. For 'generalist' as opposed to 'specialist' see B. Lonergan, "Questionnaire on Philosophy," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 2/2 (1984), 9, 21, 32-33.

51 Prof. S. Panneerselvam, Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Madras, e-mail to me, of which unfortunately I have not preserved a copy. However, this remark is interestingly corroborated by Patrick Vincent: "Fr Richard De Smet was one of the foremost Vedāntins in India." Vincent 24. See also George McLean: "What excited me about Fr. De Smet's original work was that it enabled the richness of Shankara and the Hindu tradition of the interior path to the divine to be re-related to the material world from which it has been separated. / Father De Smet pioneered this re-relation by opening the connection which the advaitin scholarship had severed in the interpretation of Shankara. ... / I saw with my own eyes the excitement this caused at a meeting at the University of Madras when two key people jumped up at the end of his talk, which summarized the first part of his dissertation, to say that this was the way hindu philosophy needed to be done and that he was one of the greatest advaitins in India, indeed in the whole world." (E-mail to me, dt. 7 April 2010, with minor corrections).

52 R. Panikkar, "Epoché in the Religious Encounter," *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1984), 77-90.

should we say, talk about dialogue—which proceeds by a unilateral and a priori shedding of anything that seems difficult and problematic, De Smet was convinced, and lived the conviction, that true dialogue presupposes a strong and clear identity, not a lack of it, and that it was far more honest to state clearly one's convictions rather than hide them or bracket them or water them down in an attempt that was meant to be charitable but was in fact merely condescending.

In his model of dialogue, then, there is no jettisoning of the past, and no need to attack the Greco-Roman heritage of Christianity. In fact—though perhaps De Smet might not have put it in these terms—such an attempt is clearly impossible. Contemporary hermeneutics recognizes the impossibility of presuppositionless interpretation, of attempting to approach texts with an Empty Head, of trying to set aside one's historicity. With Gadamer, instead, it recognizes that one's historicity, far from being an obstacle, is the royal road to the understanding of an other. The way to understanding and comprehension is through a fusion of horizons rather than by pretending that horizons do not exist. And fusion of horizons involves the hard and painstaking labour of becoming a scholar—a scholar who does not only attempt to expand into the horizon of the other, but also takes pains to appropriate her own horizon. Thus the intrareligious dialogue must, in a sense, precede—or at least accompany—the interreligious dialogue. De Smet's 'campaign on the person' is, I believe, an exemplification of precisely this kind of double dialogue or fusion of horizons. And his mastery of traditional Western metaphysics, far from being an obstacle, was the 'royal road' to his being able to understand the Indian tradition and a sophisticated thinker like Śaṅkara—as became so abundantly evident in his dialogue with Swami Krishnananda at Rishikesh.

To De Smet's mastery of both traditions, Western Christian and Indian, must be added his *deeply sympathetic and generous approach* to Hinduism and to Indian traditions in general.⁵³ He exemplified what has been said of Thomas, that he made Aristotle appear better than he was, that often his interpretation of Aristotle was not so much faithful to the text as to the deep intention animating it. De Smet was, in fact, often involved in 'developing the positions,' in the words of Lonergan.⁵⁴

53 See for example the contrast with someone like Hacker: "But whereas Hacker was sometimes confrontational in his Christian appraisal of Śaṅkara and the tradition of Advaita, De Smet followed to a greater degree the avenue of correlation wherever possible, and whenever disagreement with mainstream non-dualist doctrine arose he avoided all combative or acrimonious tones" (Malkovsky, "Introduction" 10).

54 B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 251: "When he develops positions and reverses counter-positions, he will be presenting an idealized version of the past, something better than was the reality."

De Smet procedure, it seems to me, exemplifies Lonergan's functional specialty foundations which is critical in the sense that it operates on the basis of the good conscience of a "duly enlightened" and "truly virtuous" person,⁵⁵ where "due enlightenment" presupposes "sufficiently comprehensive deliberation" secured through painstaking scholarship if not exactly through the functional specialties of research, interpretation, history, and dialectic.

Finally, De Smet also exemplifies what Panikkar calls *dialogical dialogue* in contrast to dialectical dialogue,⁵⁶ or what Lonergan calls dialogue in contrast to dialectic,⁵⁷ which means that he was one of those who was not content to remain at the level of an objective encounter with texts, but took the trouble to engage all through his fifty years of active service in interpersonal encounter with persons.

On the 'negative' side, *current subaltern sensitivity* leads us to ask whether De Smet takes sufficiently into account the socio-cultural context within which the texts and schools emerged, or whether instead they tend to concentrate principally on the contribution of the dominant social groups. In his *Guidelines*, for example, my impression is that, while De Smet does not take the path of explicitly situating and contextualizing the movement of thought in the Indian subcontinent, he does not fail to make allusions to this context, and sometimes quite abundantly, as in chapter 5.⁵⁸ While the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas emerged from the dominant Āryan group, and were almost certainly the work of Brahmins, Śaivism is acknowledged as possibly having non-Āryan or non-Brāhmanic origins,⁵⁹ and the Upaniṣads as containing non-Brāhmanic and non-Āryan elements, as also an attention to women that is not always sustained in subsequent tradition.⁶⁰ Then again, the śramaṇic movements were non-Brāhmanic and possibly non-Āryan. The Jina and the Buddha were not Brahmins, and their teachings and the movements originating with them constituted major challenges to the established order. De Smet gives much attention, in fact, to the centuries-long dialectic between Buddhism and Hinduism, though in

55 B. Lonergan, "Bernard Lonergan Responds (1)," *Shorter Papers*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 20, ed. Robert C. Croken, Robert M. Doran, and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 2007), 271-272.

56 See, e.g., R. Panikkar, "Witness and Dialogue," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983), 241-244.

57 See Ivo Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method: The 'Universal Viewpoint' in Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 184-187.

58 GIP 177-182.

59 GIP 464-465.

60 GIP 73.

his opinion most of the leading figures of Buddhist thought were originally Brahmins.⁶¹ It is revealing that chapter 5, “From Brāhmanism to Hinduism: The Age of the Systems,” was simply called “The Encounter of Brāhmanism with Buddhism” in the original Table of Contents. Attention to the dialectic is one of the leitmotifs of the *Guidelines*, along with the identification of elements that will be eventually integrated in Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta.

3

ACPI: Towards an Indian Christian School of Socio-Critical Theory

Keith D’Souza, SJ

The ACPI is deeply grateful for the inspiration and energy of Richard De Smet, SJ, and the founding figures of the ACPI. We are similarly grateful for the original dual intention with which the ACPI was founded: to have a parallel forum of Indian Christian reflection, alongside the annual meetings of the Indian Philosophical Congress, and more substantially, to create a specific mode of reflection keeping both Indian and Christian concerns, interests and unique ways of philosophizing in mind.

Richard De Smet was a great intellectual leader directing us in a specific thought process of Indian Christian Philosophizing. However, this article features a part of the philosophical journey of the ACPI not so much ‘along with’ Richard De Smet, SJ, but much more ‘ahead of’ De Smet. In particular, the article will highlight a specific focus in ACPI discourse which has evolved the years, moving in the direction of an ‘Indian Christian School of Socio-Critical Theory.’

1. A Forum for Philosophizing as Indian Christians

The undergirding current which drives the ACPI is to develop a distinctively Indian and Christian mode of philosophical reflection. A related ontological intention is the desire to work towards a wholesome blending of both these ‘Christian’ and ‘Indian’ identities. A strong conviction or foundational presupposition which ACPI operates from is that these two identities are

⁶¹ See *GIP* 183. As far as the subaltern context is concerned, it would be interesting to consult Giri K. John, *Brahmajijñāsā of Śaṅkara as Theology: A Post-Colonial Appraisal* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2013).

not in opposition to each other. On the contrary, there are several existential overlaps between the living out of both of these identities.

Each one of us is a host of multiple contextual-based identities—some thicker, some thinner, in terms of existential import.¹ While there may be several identities which are quite demanding in terms of roles and responsibilities (being a teacher, a priest, a parent, a member of Parliament, etc.), for those associated with the ACPI, being Indian and being Christian are two of our most fundamental identities. The ACPI has attempted to address issues and engage argumentatively from this unique perspective of being Indian Christians.

While there has been an open horizon of philosophical themes and methodologies since the inception of the ACPI, over recent years ACPI discourse has moved much more in the direction of socio-critical theory, somewhat akin to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and the 'New School for Social Research' in New York.² In years to come, perhaps the ACPI may come to be known as the 'Indian Christian School of Socio-Critical Theory.' More will be highlighted later in the article about this unique character of contemporary ACPI discourse.

2. Shifts in the Evolution of ACPI

One of the original intentions of the founders of ACPI was to create a forum for philosophical thinking and research which would facilitate philosophical formation within the wider ambit of Seminary formation. Practical efforts which stemmed from ACPI meetings were the creation and sharing of basic philosophical literature to aid seminary formators and those in formation. This was similar to the initial intention of Frederick Copleston, SJ, whose works eventually resulted in a multi-volume series which has become one of the standard philosophical references for beginners in the field. However, instead of notes related to specific syllabi, what the ACPI has been consistently producing over the year are annual publications on various themes of significance. These have turned out to be invaluable resources for Seminary staff and students, as thematic philosophical reference works.

Another aspect of the original thrust of the ACPI was the creation of a forum or guild for philosophical experts to gather annually, often around the same time as the seminars conducted by the Indian Philosophical Congress (IPC). Hence the number of participants in initial ACPI meetings

1 Humans are beings with multiple identities. See, for example, Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), where the author argues against the fixation of singular identities, which is one of the primary conditions for social mischief and division.

2 See details about the New School for Social Research at: <https://www.newschool.edu/nssr/history/>.

was relatively small, in comparison to those attending the annual research seminars. Over the years there has been a gradual policy shift, in inviting not just experts to participate and present papers, but even doctoral students to do so. In fact, even Masters' students are gladly welcome to participate in current ACPI research seminars. Beyond this, there has been a gradual disconnect between IPC seminar schedules and ACPI seminar schedules. The ACPI now has its research seminars in the month of October, in various settings across India. These developments have provided beneficial opportunities for students across India to be exposed to, and participate in rich philosophical deliberations on diverse themes and thinkers.

There have been several dispositional and thematic migrations over the years, in ACPI deliberations and research outcomes. The classical or traditional ways of doing philosophy—with which De Smet and his peers were most comfortable—have gradually given way to more contemporary perspectives, concerns and methodologies. From classical considerations, through more modern ones, we now find ourselves in a post-modern and even post-truth milieu. Phenomenological, hermeneutical and post-modern methodologies have invited us to move from abstract, generalized theoretical reflection towards contextual, local, material, applicative reflections. As a result, from more universal and generalized modes of thinking, we have come to appreciate more perspectival and contextualized approaches to philosophical reflection. This movement is similar to developments in Indian theological reflection as well. The desire for liberation is perceived not just from the traditional and spiritual understanding of *moksa*, but beyond that, in terms of the desire for personal and communitarian liberation within socio-political contexts, and the desire for personal wellbeing or wellness in more globalized, urban settings.

One of the most significant institutional and organizational developments of the ACPI is its formal identification as a Registered Society. Perhaps because of this, the regular research output of the ACPI has expanded rapidly over recent years. Besides more than twenty-five annual publications, there have been several special commemorative volumes and Festschriften. More significantly, the ACPI has come out with a unique two-volume encyclopedia, and efforts are on to come out with an expanded second edition. The uniqueness of this project lies in its user-friendly language (unlike technical philosophical encyclopedias), innovative themes, and the covering of both Indian and Christian topics. Western encyclopedias in Philosophy do not typically cover Indian philosophical reflection in much detail, and Indian philosophical encyclopedias do not typically cover Christian philosophical reflection. The ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy attempts to address and remedy this gap in encyclopedic literature in Philosophy. Besides this, the ACPI encyclopedia makes space

for nonstandard and unconventional themes that are often ignored by most other encyclopedias.

3. The Unique Character of Contemporary ACPI Discourse

The ACPI has attempted to fill in a thematic and methodological gap which is not normally present in the realm of secular studies (in Colleges and Universities) and also ecclesiastical studies (in Seminaries). Unlike most Western philosophical publications, which are often very technical and analytical, and not as reader-friendly, ACPI research has been more interested in application, rather than extensive and abstract argumentation and explanation. Unlike most Indian philosophical publications, which are largely classical, descriptive and narrative in nature, ACPI reflections and publications have moved in the direction of critical analysis, increasingly featuring subaltern traditions, besides dominant traditions.

While the ACPI does not advocate any particular form or style of philosophical reflection—or privilege any specific area or theme in Philosophy—in recent times there has been a focus on themes for reflection which are considerably more socially relevant in some way or the other—themes which may not be systematically addressed in more formal secular and ecclesiastical philosophical settings. The ACPI has seen a shift whereby social relevance and contextual thinking have been preferred to more generalized and abstract philosophizing.

In this regard, the ACPI has been moving towards the formulation of a school of socio-critical theory, somewhat like that of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, or the New School of Social Research in NY. In its incipient stages, ‘The New School for Social Research’ began as the ‘University in Exile’³—largely for Jewish scholars who had managed to escape the ravages of intellectual suppression in Europe because of growing fascism between the two World Wars. The ACPI shares some similarity with the original concerns of these two academic bodies, given its association with a minority religious community as well as its concerns regarding pressures on, and stresses experienced by marginalized sections of society.

The focus and texture of the deliberations and research of the ACPI, though, will have a distinctively Indian and Christian flavor, considering our complex contextual situation: plural, religious, culturally diverse, materially developing, with multiple subaltern groups of class/caste/gender/race, etc. The themes covered in the annual and special ACPI publications over recent years indicate this strong current of socio-critical reflection on diverse issues.

3 See <https://newuniversityinexileconsortium.org/about/history/> for a brief note about the history of the “University in Exile.”

While this attention to social themes within the ACPI is philosophically objective and allowing for nuances, it is also largely from a subaltern perspective, not simply a majoritarian or dominant perspective. While there are several approaches within social critique, a basic methodological or hermeneutical approach involved would be to begin with explanatory analyses of social patterns and practices, then moving to wholesome critique, in order to arrive at a richer understanding of the situation and thereby propose desirable pathways forward.

This practical discursive orientation in terms of the application of philosophy to social issues is especially needed in our times, when Seminary students often do not see the relevance or applicative value of Philosophy as an ecclesiastical discipline. It is hoped that this focus on social issues and the applicative value of philosophical reflection related to these themes will garner more interest in Philosophy as a valuable aspect of ecclesiastical formation. It will also hopefully attract more participants from a general (non-clerical and non-religious) audience, in terms of participation in our research seminars and scholarly contributions to our many research projects (books and encyclopaedia).

4. Challenges and Possibilities Ahead for the ACPI

While the ACPI has achieved much in the past many years, there are many areas which still need attention, in terms of achieving a higher benchmark in philosophical reflection and research. Much needs to be done to make the Association more ‘Christian.’ At present members and seminar participants are largely Catholic. Besides inviting and including Christians of other denominations into the fold, there is a need to network with Christian philosophical forums across the globe. Several such organizations exist and if we desire to be outward looking and inclusive, we would do well to invite resource persons from other Christian forums to engage with the ACPI in some way or the other. This would also enable our publications to be wider known and subscribed to.

Another concern is the predominantly masculine presence in our annual research seminars. There is a need to invite more women scholars and participants in our deliberations and research projects. The lack of a feminine perspective in the many activities of ACPI can only lead to the impoverishment of the quality of its deliberations. This need for social inclusion also entails a conscious drive to invite other underrepresented segments of society to have a voice in the ACPI—in terms of seminar participation and scholarly contribution.

There is also a need to network with other Indian philosophical associations. How many ACPI members attend national philosophical seminars? Or has ACPI replaced the ICPR (Indian Council for Philosophical

Research) and the IPC (Indian Philosophical Congress) and other national and secular philosophical forums, in the minds of those whose work is almost exclusively related to ecclesial programmes and projects? This would be an unfortunate development, as there is a dire need to network and collaborate—at substantial, and not just peripheral levels—with persons of other religious and cultural traditions. Such networking will throw open possibilities for access to a wide spectrum of resource persons for the ACPI as well as the several institutions and associations which are allied to the ACPI. It is good to remind ourselves that the founders of the ACPI used to host ACPI meetings around the same time and venue as the IPC meetings. While this practice need not be duplicated today, it would be beneficial for at least some ACPI members to take part in seminars hosted by these national and secular forums.

The project of 'regional philosophizing' is still in its incipient stage in the ACPI. While this has had a decent beginning, it needs to be followed through more systematically and regularly. This will help provide a local and contextual flavour to philosophizing. This will also enable local relationships to be built, between ecclesial and larger philosophical associations. Topics and themes which feature common concerns could be considered, as focal points for discussion at local levels. In today's communally divisive situation, this could prove to be one more resource for peace-making.

The method of philosophical presentation and discussion in India is largely descriptive and narrative in nature. ACPI discourse could help provide an alternative to these more common and widespread modes of academic communication, by engaging in exercises of critical explanation, understanding and application. In this regard, the ability to critique oneself, one's own tradition and to seek critique from others, is also extremely necessary. There is a dire need for more 'intra-religious' critique among ourselves, and 'inter-religious' critique from other persons and communities. Presently the ACPI often addresses Indian thought and social realities in a critical manner. To be more credible, it is also important to address Christian thought and practice in a critical manner—and to invite persons of other faiths to join us in doing so in a positive and productive manner. This is close to the ideal of 'synodality' which the late Pope Francis initiated: inviting as many of the human family to walk together towards a common goal, seeking the common good, fostering solidarity as well as being open to wholesome mutual critique. In keeping with this spirit of synodality and solidarity, the nature and dynamics of being an 'Indian Christian' needs to be considered more widely: in collaboration with Indians from different cultural and religious communities, and with Christians from other nations and cultural traditions. This will add both depth and width to the philosophical deliberations within the ACPI.

The Calcutta School of Jesuit Indology Its Influence upon Richard De Smet

Prof. Dr. Sean M Doyle

Introduction

In his published scholarship on Richard De Smet S.J., Ivo Coelho has repeatedly noted the self-professed influence of the Calcutta school of Jesuit Indology upon this seminal Belgian theologian.¹ For instance, in the preface to his doctoral dissertation on 'The Theological Method of Śaṅkara,' De Smet mentions his indebtedness to Georges Dandoy, Pierre Johanns, and Michel Ledrus, who were the leading luminaries of the early twentieth century Jesuit apostolate in Bengal. Although De Smet eventually developed his own innovative and distinctive interpretation of Śaṅkara's *advaita* teaching, moving away from the traditional acosmist reading of his predecessors, rich metaphysical lines of inquiry regarding the relation of Brahman to the world were previously suggested to him through his exposure to the writings of the Calcutta Jesuits. These Indologists analyzed topics such as causality, contingent being, *creatio ex nihilo*, and passive potentiality in their multifaceted engagement with *advaita*, mapping out theological terrain within which De Smet would traverse in his own explorations.

¹ See, for example, Ivo Coelho's edited volumes *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013), 2; and *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), 8.

In order to more fully ascertain the prior Jesuit influences upon De Smet, with which he implicitly interacted and modified, this article will sketch the basic historical background of the Calcutta school of Indology and will discuss selected themes which are representative of the key comparative concerns of Dandoy, Johanns, and Ledrus. Understanding the contextual and theological background of the Calcutta Jesuits will provide a deepened dimension to a robust appreciation of the intellectual and scholarly development of Richard De Smet.

1. Historical Background to the Calcutta Jesuits

In 1907, the Indian patriot and thinker Brahmapāndab Upādhyāy (1861-1907) died as a result of complications from lockjaw, an immeasurable loss to the emerging theological encounter between Christianity and Hinduism. A decade earlier, Upādhyāy began to experiment with a bold project in his Calcutta-based journals such as *Sophia Monthly*. This pioneering exploration can now be properly celebrated as a nascent form of comparative theology, where Upādhyāy creatively engaged *advaita* metaphysics from a Thomist perspective. As he wrestled with the viewpoint of Śāṅkara, Upādhyāy came to the conclusion that the *ācārya*'s teachings regarding the basic relationship between the unconditioned Absolute and the empirical world were not incommensurate with fundamental Catholic theology.

Upādhyāy correlated Śāṅkara's exposition of *māyā*, traditionally interpreted as world-illusion, with the mysterious reality of contingent being which receives its existence from God, the necessary Being. In a profound reflection upon the Christian understanding of creation that creatively utilized *advaita* terminology, he asserted:

Brahman is Being itself. He alone is identical with his own being while creatures have no right of being but have a merely participated and dependent existence. They exist by *māyā*, i.e., by the habit of participating [in] the divine being and springing from the divine act. *Māyā* is a mysterious divine operation; it is neither real nor unreal. Who can explain how the phenomenal multiplicity results from the immutable Unity, how being is communicated to the finite, how creatures come to possess being at all?²

Similarly, Upādhyāy analyzed the *advaita* concepts of *asaṅga* and *nirguṇa*, particularly as they indicate the nature of Brahman as completely unrelated to and unaffected by the apparent material realm. He used these terms as categories through which to interpret the Christian understanding of God as completely self-sufficient and not connected by necessity to anything

contingent. For Upādhyāy, God is “*asaṅga* (without need of company) to whom the creation of the finite is but an act proceeding out of munificence, luxury, sport (*līlā*) and not out of any necessity of His nature.”³ He is also “*nirguṇam* that is He possesses no external attributes, no necessary correlation with any other being other than his infinite Self.”⁴ Similar *advaita* technical terminology, such as *saguṇa*, *mokṣa*, and *līlā*, is used by Upādhyāy to convey his capacious viewpoint on the Christian doctrine of creation. As an early exemplar of comparative theology, he returned from his immersion in Śāṅkara's writings to his home tradition of Catholic theology with its Scholastic metaphysical emphases; he then sought to articulate more fully an authentically Christian outlook on the mystery of the relation of God and the world with the assistance of *advaita* language and sensibilities. Unfortunately, Upādhyāy encountered suspicions and misunderstandings of his intentions by certain Catholic authorities, who censured his journals and silenced his theological output. He died with his theological project unfulfilled.

Rewachand Gyanchand Animananda (d. 1945) was the devoted disciple of Upādhyāy, serving as a co-editor of *Sophia Monthly* and a fellow *saṁnyasi* co-founder of a religious *math* with his beloved spiritual master. When Upādhyāy passed away at the age of 46, Animananda continued to express his own Catholic devotion through the indigenous framework and vocabulary of Indian spirituality. For example, Animananda theologized in a manner which resonated with Upādhyāy's comparative reflections on creation, “This infinite Absolute Being, overflowing with bliss, enters into relation with this infinitesimally small thing, man. He loves him with an everlasting love. He loved him even when he did not exist, even when he was merely an idea in the mind of God, and because He loved him, he transferred the idea into an actuality by virtue of his omnipresence.”⁵

When Animananda subsequently encountered two Calcutta-based Jesuit educators, Pierre Johanns (1882-1955) and Georges Dandoy (1882-1962), who were looking for some useful endeavor to further their missional and vocational objectives, he encouraged them to revitalize explorations of the theological contours of inquiry suggested by Upādhyāy. Animananda recognized that these Jesuits would be particularly well-suited for this undertaking because they were highly trained in both Vedāntic and Thomist philosophies. According to Animananda's biographer, Paul Turmes, “when the plan was mooted of a review whose main purpose would be to present Christ to India in a way adapted to her culture and mentality, his

2 *Sophia Monthly*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (February 1899).

3 *Sophia Weekly*, Vol.1, no. 23, New Series (1 December 1900), 5.

4 *Sophia Weekly*, Vol. 1, no. 2, New Series (23 June 1900), 7.

5 Animananda, “Whom Should We Love,” in *Light of the East* (July 1940), 107.

[Animananda's] face brightened up, and his casting vote was given at once in favour of this new proposal."⁶

Johanns and Dandoy previously received rigorous intellectual formation in philosophical theology in Belgium and in Indology in Oxford. They were products of a vision originally conceived by William Wallace (1863-1922), an Irish Jesuit whose missionary work in the Calcutta province convinced him that a new missiological approach to Hindus was desperately needed. Wallace campaigned to his superiors in Belgium to encourage the commissioning of novices for an intellectual apostolate in India. This would require high-level academic training in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy, in addition to the regular intensive instruction in Scholastic philosophy. Wallace was a self-taught student of Hindu spirituality; his unpublished manuscripts collected in the Goethals Indian Library of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata display a depth of scholarly interest in Vedānta, Yoga, and Hindu mysticism. For example, in *An Introduction to Hindoo Philosophy*, he portrays *advaita* liberation as a condition where an individual "opens out to infinity." Another striking way that he describes *mokṣa* is "being absorbed."⁷ In this understanding of ultimate spiritual absorption, Wallace envisions a state of awareness where the immensity of an object overwhelms the observing subject in such a way as to remove all else from immediate perception. If intensity of absorption characterizes unmediated observation of a lovely or sublime temporal object, then what must be the visceral quality of direct, unbroken vision of the transcendent Absolute? Wallace, displaying a sensitive understanding of *advaita*, tries to capture the experience in this manner:

What may we expect when the Light of the Eternal arises in the soul, light to which that which fills this universe is but shadow, light subtler than the subtlest, purer than the purest, sweeter than the sweetest and sweeter still? What but absorption so deep and so glad that the person is buried in Joy of the infinite Glory it is realizing in open vision. Absorbed in that One beside whom there is no second, absorbed in union where Absorber and absorbed are two no longer, the world has utterly gone out, its pleasures with its pains, its hopes with its fears, its living with its dying, for I now stand where all these things are as though they were not.⁸

6 P. Turmes, *A Teacher of Genius: B. Animananda* (Calcutta: Xavier Publications, 1963), 63.

7 William Wallace, *An Introduction to the Hindoo Philosophy*, unpublished typescript in Goethals' Indian Library, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, 218. Special thanks to Jeyaraj Veluswamy S.J. for providing scans and permission to quote from Wallace's manuscript.

8 *Ibid.*

Johanns and Dandoy were directly guided by the aspirations of Animananda and William Wallace, who were themselves heirs to the comparative theological project of Brahmadānab Upādhyāy. When the two Jesuit Indologists established their own periodical in 1922, *Light of the East*, they explicitly paid tribute to the legacies of Upādhyāy and Wallace in early articles in the journal, and they included numerous submissions by Animananda throughout the lifespan of the journal. They also established an academic rapport with a Belgian Jesuit teaching in Louvain, Michel Ledrus (1899-1983), and published his multiple contributions on 'Catholic *advaita*' in *Light of the East*. Ledrus would eventually settle in Calcutta in 1935 for several years in order to edit the Jesuit journal *The New Review* before his subsequent appointment as a Professor at the Gregorian University in Rome.

Thus, there is an unbroken lineage of Catholic interface with *advaita* which can be traced from Upādhyāy to Animananda and William Wallace, who in turn influenced Pierre Johannis, Georges Dandoy, and Michel Ledrus. The level of sophisticated metaphysical and theological engagement with *advaita* characterized by this Calcutta school of Jesuit Indology has no rival in the twentieth century. These key, but largely overlooked, individuals in early to middle twentieth century Hindu-Christian dialogue served as an inspiration for better known subsequent figures such as Bede Griffiths, Jules Monchinin, and Richard De Smet, who had each read the contributions of the Calcutta Jesuits. In order to introduce salient aspects of the comparative theologies of these pioneering figures, a representative theme expounded upon by each Jesuit will be selected and explicated in detail, based upon their primary source writings which engage *advaita* from a Christian perspective.

2. Critique of Causality - Georges Dandoy S.J.

In his longest scholarly monograph, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the Unreality of the World in Advaita*,⁹ Georges Dandoy spends much time analyzing the philosophical presuppositions of *satkāryavāda* causality, where effects pre-exist within and are accidental or substantial transformations of their material causes.¹⁰ He claims that Śaṅkara was deeply troubled with the theological implications of the traditional Hindu application of this schema to Brahman, where an act of causation would entail internally latent, mutable effects which are subsequently manifested and exteriorized. For Śaṅkara, however, Brahman the "Self-Subsistent

9 Georges Dandoy, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the Unreality of the World in the Advaita*, Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press, 1919.

10 The Sāṃkhya school of philosophy most fully developed this doctrine of causality, which was then accepted by Vedāntic exegetes.

is absolutely unchangeable, without modes or accidents.”¹¹ According to Dandoy, rather than entertain the possibility that the Absolute may be tainted by modifications, Śāṅkara maintains that the effect does not really exist and the apparent transformation of cause into effect is only illusory. The Calcutta Jesuits, following the majority interpretive position of their era, regarded *advaita* as an acosmist metaphysical posture that asserted *vivarta* (apparent modification) rather than *pariṇāma* (actual modification) in response to the *satkāryavāda* doctrine. Dandoy thus believed that Śāṅkara was led to deny the ontological reality of the created realm because the *ācārya* was restricted by an incomplete and limited account of causation, namely the supposition that the world-effect must imply an internal modification of the material cause, which is Brahman.

By way of critique of this conception of causality, Dandoy grants that there are “lower” forms of simple causation which accord well with the *satkāryavāda* model, but upon closer inspection, more complex instances of causality cannot be reduced to this explanatory schema. He challenges the totalizing model of causation to which Śāṅkara was responding, in order to suggest that the denial of the production of the world-effect was not philosophically necessary in the first place. Dandoy suggests that in the preferred *satkāryavāda* examples cited in the traditional discourse, pots are simply consolidated clay, and cloth is nothing more than threads woven together. In these instances, no substantial change occurs in the transformation of material causes into effects beyond the level of mere accidental characteristics. He asserts: “the kind of causation which the *advaita* has accepted as typical is the accidental transmutation of material substances, the transmutation which leaves the substances intact and only changes its modalities.”¹² However, this delimited form of causation is by no means the most dominant or pervasive mode of causality, for as one proceeds up the scale of complexity, the material cause can no longer be identified with the “essence of the effect.”¹³ One concrete example provided by Dandoy is that of human procreation, where the child at birth is neither the same essence nor even identical organic material as the parent. The child, as individualized effect, must be totally distinct in substance from the biological cause, otherwise once a parent died, the child would also cease to exist.

Dandoy believes that he has problematized the notion that the effect is by definition a modification, whether accidental or substantial, of the material cause. The larger metaphysical implication is that in the highest

11 *Ibid.*, 56.

12 *Ibid.*, 57.

13 *Ibid.*

type of causation, where the Absolute produces a world in an act of creation, the effect need not be strictly regarded as the same essence or substantially identical with the supreme Cause, and the universe need not necessarily be viewed as an internal self-modification (*pariṇāma*) of the divine. In fact, in a broader view of causality not restricted by *satkāryavāda* boundaries, God’s nature and divine substance need not be tainted in any manner in order to enact the production of the physical realm.

Not only does Dandoy believe that higher causal processes do not fit within the parameters of the *satkāryavāda* model, but he also asserts that the higher up one moves in the scale of causal complexity, the less the cause itself is affected by the production of the effect. In the act of communication, the articulation of words affects the speaker less than the listener, who as recipient may experience pain or pleasure based upon the tone and content of the speech. From this observation regarding the lessening impact upon the cause as one ascends from simple material acts of causation to those of the will, Dandoy proceeds to ask whether the highest Cause can act without any change being produced internally. In other words, if God as the perfect causal agent engages in an act of causality, can we affirm that He is truly an ‘unmoved mover?’ Dandoy answers this metaphysical query in the affirmative. Based upon his observations of higher order causality, Dandoy asserts:

Because all imperfect causes are changed when causing, we have no right to conclude that no cause can act without being changed. On the contrary, the being changed is evidently due to the imperfection of the earthly causes, to the fact that they are dependent causes, that they have to be moved, acted upon, in order to move, to act upon others; and this being changed not only can, but *must* a priori be absent from the pure Cause, from God. Secondary, dependent causes necessarily change themselves when causing change; the Primary, independent Cause, because pure cause, can produce changes without Itself changing.¹⁴

The overall purpose of Dandoy’s careful exploration of the dynamics of causation is to deny the totalizing nature of the *satkāryavāda* presupposition from which Śāṅkara drew such stark metaphysical conclusions. First, Dandoy believes that he has refuted the notion that the effect is necessarily a mere modification, accidentally or substantially, of the cause. The world as effect is therefore not identical in essence with Brahman, the supreme Cause. Second, Dandoy is confident that he has demonstrated that the first Cause need not undergo internal transformation in the process of producing an

14 *Ibid.*, 60.

effect. The first Cause thereby is not necessarily affected or changed by the creation of a tangible world. Śaṅkara denied the real existence of the world, according to Dandoy, in order to protect Brahman from the charge that in the act of creating, the Cause has passed into the effect and thereby changed in some manner. Dandoy argues that this radical metaphysical negation was not philosophically necessary. A careful analytical consideration of causation shows that a supreme Cause can produce an effect without any diminution, limitation, or transformation within itself. The denial of the empirical world to safeguard the integrity of the first Cause is not metaphysically required. Other models of higher causation are available, and other ways of conceiving of the ontological status of the physical world are possible.

3. *Creatio Ex Nihilo* – Pierre Johanns S.J.

Pierre Johanns, contending with the underlying reasons for the *advaita* denial of *pariṇāma* so as to protect the independence and self-sufficiency of the Absolute, instead posited a real act of creation whereby contingent reality is conferred into a sphere of total privation in a gesture of absolute giving on the part of God. Johanns denies an immanent causality, where the limited world-reality is contained in some manner within the divine essence. In this compromised metaphysical scenario “God would no longer be exclusively His own substance and thus no longer independent.”¹⁵ Śaṅkara, constricted as he was by a *satkāryavāda* model, does not entertain the possibility that the compenetrating of a void of privation with a world-reality of dependent being in no way affects the Being of God, nor is there any blurring of boundaries between the Absolute and the relative world. In such an act of *creatio ex nihilo*, God remains pure *Sat* in undiluted concentration, and the world is mere contingent being that is a created entity dependent for its every moment of existence upon necessary Being. Johanns asserted, “We understand now how the world borrows from God a subsistence of its own. It is a limited world. It has therefore its own basis, the absolute limitation, the privation from which it arises. The continual influence of the divine creativity in act is thus constantly required, if the world is not, by its own movement, to return to its own privation.”¹⁶

If one were to analyze the ontological status of the world-creation, then one must confess that in and of itself, it is mere nothingness and a sheer void. Were God to suddenly terminate His ongoing activity which confers contingent being into privation, the world would cease to exist in any form. It is only due to God’s ontological support and continuous conveying of relative being into emptiness that the world has any existence at all, which it

directly receives from the Creator. Johanns stated, “We can say with Śaṅkara that there is but one Reality, adding the qualification ‘absolute’: there is but one absolute Reality, which leaves room for a real world of relative reality and does not compel us to consider the world as an unreality. The absolute Reality contains the relative reality in the form of Reality, but such ‘being contained’ designates not the existence of the world but its possibility.”¹⁷

Because the world does not possess its own-being (*svabhava*), there is a sense in which God ‘contained’ the world-possibility within Himself *prior* to the act of creation, in sheer absorption in a mode of complete *advaita* unity. However, subsequent to creation, the world-explication is exteriorized in a concretized form, as *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* are exhibited in a distinct sphere separate from God. Johanns asserts that Śaṅkara’s metaphysics accurately suggests the pre-creation state of non-duality between world-potentiality and the Absolute. In addition, should God’s ongoing gifting of relative being into privation be removed, all would return to the *advaitic* state so loftily described by Śaṅkara. According to Johanns, Śaṅkara, hemmed in by a restrictive view of causation, does not consider the metaphysical possibility that the divine *Sat* is so effulgent and fecund that it is able to give of itself and compenetrates a substratum of complete privation in a creative act. The world-effect, however, while in the image of the Cause, is not an identical production of the divine essence because it is a merging of reality with limitation. Johanns explained:

But the world must have a form. How can the form of the world come from God and subsist in the field of privation? All being that acts, acts according to its form. Therefore what God tries to communicate to the world is His own form. But this form can only be received in the substratum of privation and according to the nature of this privation. The world therefore will be the form of God but in another substratum. But a form that subsists in another substratum is an image and hence the world will exist as an image of the divine Reality, as a reproduction of God. Now we understand the possibility of the world. An image is distinct from its original but, as image, it has no meaning except through its relation to the Original. In so far as it fails to reproduce the original, it does not image and hence is nothing in its own line.¹⁸

Johanns agrees that the notion of the world as an internal mode of God, which Śaṅkara rightly rejects, is indeed a misconception. A world which exists ‘by itself and for itself outside God’ or that exists internally within

15 *Light of the East*, “Retrospect,” (March 1923), 2.

16 *Light of the East*, “The Value of Śaṅkara’s Philosophy,” (January 1935), 44–45.

17 Pierre Johanns, *Introduction to the Vedānta* (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1937), 37.

18 *Light of the East*, “The Value of Śaṅkara’s Philosophy,” (January 1935), 45.

the essence of God as a ‘partial self-transformation of God’ is a dangerous notion which taints the Absolute. But a world which exists ‘outside God as a reproduction of God’ is quite a satisfactory position, for it would be ‘real by this Reality and for this Reality.’¹⁹ In this more capacious cosmology, the existence of a Being which is Absolute reality is complemented with a real world of relative, dependent reality. The world images aspects of the divine qualities in an entirely distinct substratum in a sphere of exteriority, but it is not an exact mirroring or simple emanation of the divine essence, whereby Being merely extends itself outwards. Johanns concluded, “Hence God can only reproduce Himself and this presupposes that God contains the reality which He reproduces, as a cause contains its effect; that He exteriorises this reality in the only medium open to Him: in total privation or creability itself; and that this reality reproduces a form of God but in its own substratum of total finitude.”²⁰

Johanns held Śaṅkara in high regard, believing that the Hindu philosopher’s underlying motivations to protect the purity of Brahman and to reject any notion of a self-subsistent world were laudable. When speaking of the reality of the empirical realm *on its own terms*, the *ācārya* was right to see the primary relation of the world to God as that of sheer absorption. Johanns also believed that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* would solve some of the deeper antinomies that he perceived in the *advaita* view of reality. Because the world in and of itself is mere privation and receptivity, the actualizing of its existence by God does not impugn His independence nor does it detract in any way from His transcendence or self-sufficiency. One may affirm both the necessary Being of the Absolute and the dependent being of the contingent realm without compromising the ontological integrity of either. According to Johanns, *creatio ex nihilo*, as a revealed doctrine, complements, expands, and even fulfills the ‘natural’ truths perceived by Śaṅkara related to Brahman’s exalted nature. The comparative reflections upon *advaita* by Johanns are largely positive in tone and display his admiration for the commitment of Śaṅkara to protect the untainted dignity of Brahman. Returning to his Thomist home tradition, Johanns more fully appreciates the significance of *creatio ex nihilo* as a layered cosmology and offers it as a supplementary model of causation which would enhance a wider metaphysical outlook.

4. Upādāna in Catholic Advaita - Michel Ledrus S.J.

Michel Ledrus follows the lead of Dandoy in denying the necessity of attributing a *satkāryavāda* model of causality to the Absolute in the production

of the material world. The effect is certainly not a self-modification of the First Cause nor is it merely an apparent but ultimately unreal transformation of the Absolute (*vivarta*), as Śaṅkara’s *advaita* propounds. Ledrus identifies the intrinsic ontological nature of an effect, through his Catholic metaphysical posture, as *upādāna*, meaning a susceptible condition which is mere receptivity, passive potency, and possibility before it is produced as a delimited object. According to Ledrus, there is a distinction between the principle of active creative communication in the Absolute versus “the principle of reception (*upādāna*), which belongs to the *effect as such*, and cannot be found in the first Cause, which is *pure cause*, but only in lower *pradhāna*-like causes.”²¹ *Upādāna* as receptivity allows for relative being to be communicated to materiality; it is not a separate entity as such but a pre-condition, ultimately made possible by the Cause, for the production of a tangible effect. In this view of causality, the effect pre-exists only in the sense of its *upādāna* potentiality, dependent upon the Cause for its full actualization into manifested materiality. *Upādāna* is further described by Ledrus in this manner, “[It is] the subjective constituent of the creature, the internal principle of its limitation, its susceptibility to name and form, the formal reason of its contingency, or imperfect, conditioned subsistence, of the relativity of its reality, in a word, a witness of its original nothingness (*asat*), of self-unreality in the creature.”²²

In a manner of speaking, the effects are latent within the Cause as passive potencies before the act of creation. There is thus an *advaita* relationship between God and the *upādāna* receptivity of the potentialities before creation. There is also an *abheda* relationship between God and effected realities after their production as materiality, because the effects cannot exist for one moment without full ontological dependence upon their Cause. Ledrus writes: “Creatures come from God as their *source*, and from nothing as their *starting-point*, thus verifying both series of texts in the Upaniṣads which state that being is born from non-being (*asatah*) as well as from being (*satah*).”²³ Ledrus characterizes his basic metaphysical viewpoint as Catholic *advaita*, which allows for the affirmation of both necessary Being and contingent modes of being. Ledrus notes that ultimately Catholic *advaita* is neither pure monism nor strict dualism. The ultimate Principle is the Being of the Creator. He is pure *Sat* and not receptivity or passivity, excluding any sort of *upādāna*. The first Cause is not in the least affected by the production of effects, but without the gift of *upādāna* to potential materiality, there would be no manifested or actuated world of

19 *Introduction to the Vedānta*, 38.

20 *Light of the East*, “Śaṅkara-Rāmānuja-Madhva,” (July 1935), 116.

21 *The New Review*, “Advaita and Creation,” (September 1938), 259.

22 *Ibid.*, 267.

23 *Ibid.*, 268.

names and forms. Ledrus asserts, “Created being is *asat* because ultimately (*paramārthatas*) it acknowledges that of itself it is but *asat*, “anything;” that as its own it owns only *upādāna* its *anātmatva* which consists in not being its own existence. It exists however by the favor (*tad aiksata*) of the Creator, confessing by its very intrinsic composition that it is not God and that God alone is.”²⁴

Ledrus further explicates the *upādāna* (receptivity, susceptibility, potentiality) nature of effects prior to creation by turning to the famous passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where Uddalaka promises (*pratijnā*) his son Svetaketu that he will instruct him in a deep truth wherein all things can be truly understood. Svetaketu is taught by means of a series of metaphors and similes which are meant to disclose the hidden doctrine. One of the most famous teachings is the following example: “Just as, my dear, by one lump of clay everything made of clay may be known; the modification (*vikāra*) is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just clay.”²⁵ The different interpretive schools of the Vedānta concur that Uddalaka is unveiling the highest knowledge to his son. What is contested is how, through the metaphor of the clay and its effects, to regard the relation between the supreme Cause and its ‘modifications.’ Ledrus will argue that Vedāntic analyses of the clay/jar metaphor miss the recognition of *upādāna* as an operative principle within the production of effected materiality.

Ledrus suggests that the teaching of Uddalaka may favor a more subtle interpretation than is commonly offered by the Vedānta commentators. For him, the metaphor is not so much an affirmation (*pariṇāma*) or denial (*vivarta*) of *satkāryavāda* causation as it is a reflection upon the essential properties of the effect itself, which is materiality. He expounds upon this idea, “We would say that Uddalaka distinguishes in the clay its receptivity (*upādāna*) and its productivity (*prakṛti*) in order to put us on the way to the supreme knowledge of the highest principle: the Cause that does not receive its effect within itself because essentially unmodifiable (*avṛkṛta-svabhāva*).”²⁶

In Ledrus’ interpretation, Uddalaka is aware that the clay as matter must be endowed with a ‘dynamic plasticity, an aptitude, to become all sorts of forms.’ It is ‘receptive’ to the obtaining of a form through the fashioning of the potter, who shapes the materiality.²⁷ The clay’s receptivity is passive, as it is submissive to the potter’s hands. Ledrus expounds, “we come to the conclusion that clay possesses the characteristics of metaphysical ‘matter;’

24 *Light of the East*, “The *Pratijnā* in Catholic *Advaita*,” (August 1932), 124.

25 *Ibid.*, 121.

26 *Ibid.*, 122.

27 *Ibid.*

and these characteristics could not have been summed up in a better word than *upādāna* plasticity or receptivity.”²⁸ The clay itself as matter must have the potentiality to be worked into limiting and defining features such as shape and solidity by an external artisan. In the production and creation of the tangible jar, the materiality of clay exhibits receptivity, plasticity, and potentiality, which Ledrus labels as a kind of ‘energy.’ The clay pot example therefore can be interpreted as a wider consideration of materiality before and after it is delimited by name and form at the potter’s hand, distinguishing between its latent potentiality for shape and its subsequent crafting into a localized form. Similarly, the world as effect is pure receptivity (i.e. clay) to the Cause before it is actuated and produced into material objects (i.e. jar). Ledrus thus asserts that Vedāntic analyses of the clay/jar metaphor miss the recognition of *upādāna* as an operative principle within the production of effected materiality. In the act of creation, the world-effect is originally passive potentiality and susceptibility which is subsequently actuated and manifested into tangible names and forms.

Conclusion

The Calcutta school of Jesuit Indology was pioneering in its profound engagement with *advaita* from a rigorous Catholic theological perspective. These luminaries were following in the footsteps of the great Brahmabāndab Upādhyāy, who ventured to think deeply about the Christian doctrine of creation after having immersed himself in Śaṅkara’s non-dualist metaphysics. Georges Dandoy critiqued *satkāryavāda* causality, Pierre Johannis articulated the significance of contingent being within a *creatio ex nihilo* cosmology, and Michel Ledrus analyzed the passive potentiality and receptivity of matter in the act of creation. Each of these Jesuits were engaging in comparative reflections informed by significant grounding in both Vedāntic and Thomistic traditions. Their writings on these topics played a formative role in the intellectual and theological development of De Smet, suggesting lines of further theological exploration.

The great Belgian scholar of Śaṅkara Richard De Smet broke new interpretive ground in his assessment of the *ācārya*’s teaching regarding *māyā* and the nature of *Brahman*, moving away from the traditional acosmist reading of his predecessors. Nonetheless, salient points of comparative engagement with *advaita* and productive avenues of inquiry were suggested to him through his prior exposure to the writings of the Calcutta Jesuits. De Smet rigorously interacted with the categories of causality, *creatio ex nihilo*, contingency, and receptivity in his own creative exposition of Śaṅkara. The earlier theological explorations of the Belgian Jesuit Indologists in Bengal

28 *Ibid.*

undoubtedly provided key points of departure and stimulation for his robust investigations. The Calcutta school, with its unbroken line of influence from Brahmabāndab Upādhyāy to Richard De Smet, can credibly be identified as the high point of Catholic theological encounter with *advaita* in the first half of the twentieth century.

5

Scholia on an Implicit Person Explorations in Thomism, Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism

Prof. Dr. Scott Randall Paine

Introduction

Is it a person, a place or a thing? It is not difficult to imagine this question passing through the mind of any one of us, anywhere in the world and at any time. It is one of the shortest lists of categories we use. But without a doubt, the pivotal notion in this tripartite list is the first: *person*. It belongs to the most spontaneous and self-evident of our ideas, and without it we would be hard-pressed to navigate through our day-to-day or make even minimal sense of our experience. However, as is the case with all of our primitive notions – those that enjoy a familiarity and spontaneity that is empirically instinctive – the notion of person presents itself as one of the most profound and yet most enigmatical of all. To paraphrase what Augustine famously said about time – ‘if you do not ask me what it is, I know what it is – but if you do ask me what it is, I no longer know’ – we can also say about personhood.

Most attempts to define it end up reaching for mere synonyms: We say a person is a ‘subject,’ a ‘fellow,’ a ‘guy,’ a ‘dude,’ a ‘gal,’ a ‘someone.’ As we will see, there are indeed serious definitions and revealing philosophical and theological approaches on the nature of personhood – as there are too, after all, regarding the nature of time – but among the religions of the

world, there exists a considerable and conspicuous divergence of emphasis regarding its role and importance. We shall focus here only on Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

One feature that characterizes the Abrahamic religions is that the supreme and ultimate realities – as to both the agents and the recipients of greatest importance in their vision of the world and in any discussion at all of liberation or salvation – are always, and irreducibly, *persons*. They are not seen to be mere forces, objects, levels of being, principles, states of consciousness, or even worlds, but *persons*. The Godhead Itself is regarded, in these traditions, as intimately and ultimately, and not just instrumentally, personal. Human beings and even angels are similarly understood to belong to this variety of being. And personal reality, in these Semitic faiths, is further characterized as the true homeland of another central notion, the notion of *spirit*. Persons are spiritual in the sense that they manifest a reality that is endowed with intellect and will, or in other words, as beings supplied with some form of self-knowledge and self-determination, and with a capacity for self-transcendence through a web of relations unavailable to impersonal beings.

The drama through which persons pass constitutes an integral part of Biblical revelation for Jews and Christians, and similarly, though perhaps less emphatically, in Koranic revelation. These dramas are not just allegorical teaching tools regarding some transcendent and more preeminent reality, but are linked inseparably to the very content and articulation of revelation. Impersonal ‘forces,’ ‘dimensions’ or ‘layers of consciousness’ never occupy an ontological status superior to that occupied by persons. Thus, persons are seen in these religions as incomparably superior to all other components of reality. The cosmos itself exists, to a significant degree, only as an ambience, even a ‘stage,’ for the lives and narratives of these conscious and free beings. Should this appear absurd in view of the expanded universe now disclosed to us through the James Webb Telescope, one would do well to familiarize oneself with the cenoscopy/idioscopy distinction of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Deely (Paine, 2023: 255-280).

When we turn, however, to the world beyond the Indus we find a cosmovision apparently at variance with this emphasis on the personal. We find this both in Hinduism and in Buddhism, although the reasons are different, and ostensibly even opposed, as we shall see. Despite this, the history of these religious traditions and the numerous and prolific mythologies they generated are full of personal gods and goddesses, heroes, *arhats*, *sadhus*, *lohas*, *avatars*, *buddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and so on. But this is simply because in the East, as anywhere else, it is not possible to undertake any discussion of reality without at least commencing our investigation from the point of view of our own personal situation and perspective, and

therefore with the conspicuous presence of our apparent individual identity. Even if we come to deny this identity, we would still have to face up to the fact that it would be *us* who were doing the denying. At the very least, when we speak in soteriological, and especially in eschatological terms, the Christian and Indian traditions view the nature and destiny of persons in ways not always easily translatable from East to West, or West to East.

We will first take a look at the development of the Western notion of the person, from Antiquity to modernity, with special attention to medieval insights. Afterwards, equipped with this historically informed understanding of personhood in the West, we will take a brief conceptual journey to the East.

1. Evolution of the Notion of Person in the West

The Dramaturgical Person

As in all areas of philosophy, the technical vocabulary we use today – in this case, in philosophical anthropology and metaphysics – finds its etymological roots in everyday terms and practices of our pre-philosophical experience. Long before we speak about the human subject as holder of rights, agent of moral responsibility and possessor of a special ontological status, we encounter a phenomenon quite familiar in the world of sensation. It is something that manifests a virtually universal cultural instinct among humans throughout the world – from Halloween and Marti Gras to Amerindian and African ritual: namely, the custom of making and using *masks*.

One of the richest, most suggestive and at times most menacing of our experiences is when we come, literally face-to-face, with another human countenance. Together with the voice that emerges from the face, and the use of our own voice in the encounter with that other human (usually assigning them a *name*, and thus *invoking* them), the face itself is the most profound, mysterious and intriguing reality which the world around us presents to our senses.

One of the deepest thinkers – but also quite neglected – of the past century was the philosopher Max Picard (1888-1965). Trained as a physician, he abandoned medicine due to what he found to be the inhuman nature of much of modern medicine, with persons being treated like machines to be fixed. For this reason, he retreated to a village of Tessin in Switzerland and passed the rest of his life writing books in defense of the signal hallmark of human dignity, the most personal and noble dimension of the body (and, finally, also of the soul), namely: the *face*. (Picard, 1929). His studies of ‘physiognomy,’ analyzing a large number of historical faces (in portraits and photos), together with essays on silence, language and technology, make of Picard a contemporary witness to the supreme importance of the human face

in history, philosophy, religion and art. And what *faces* us in the human face is, quite simply, the person.

We see, therefore, that our ancient tongues already seeded what we will call the future notions of the forensic, moral and metaphysical person, and that they did this in the modest soil of the cultural artefact of the mask. The Greek word, *prosopon* (translated as *persona* in Latin), arises first as a name for the face, the countenance, and in tragic and comedic drama for the large masks used in the spacious amphitheaters of antiquity. Although the acoustic construction of those venues was quite sophisticated, the actors nonetheless needed some artifice to project visually the characteristic facial features of their protagonists, and orally, their voices. In this way, their small visages and weak vocalizations could be made accessible to those sitting high in the more distant seats of the theater. A cone placed in the mask projected the voice, and the outsized display of the mask projected the face.

In the semantic development of words throughout history, new usages are generated by new associations, suggestions and implications, transcending the original referent (usually coming from adjustments demanded by practice); still, there tends to remain, as a rule, at least an allusion to the original meaning. The richer the associations and suggestions, the more differentiated will be the evolution of the word. In the case of *prosopon*, the transition from the meaning of face, and of the physical and dramatic artefact of the mask, to the *role* played by the actor and represented by the mask followed a rapid and logical trajectory. And from there, a further transference of meaning from the dramaturgical role played to the very actor who played the role was likewise a natural development.

The meaning's first appearance is: mask, face, countenance; and then it moves to: role, character, protagonist; and finally, the very underlying subject who possesses the face, plays the role and uses the mask. And as Latin progressively took over from Greek, so it was that the term *persona* entered into our Western tongues – not only in the Romance languages through direct derivation, but also in the Germanic tongues (as in English: *person* and German: *die Person*). In coming centuries the notion began to unfold and display its multiple aspects, having waited so long, in the multiple tragedies and comedies of ancient theater, beneath the surface of the mask.

The Forensic Person

In Rome, due to the more practical and juridical mentality of its citizens, the Latin language followed a more forensic path in the evolution of the word's meaning. Suggesting (although perhaps not deriving) its sense from the idea of the 'sound' that passes through the cone of the mask (*per-sonare*, 'sound through'), the mother tongue of our Romance languages – not yet informed

by the sophistication of Greek philosophy – gave preference to a cleaner and more abstract significance of words. Thus arose the tendency to attribute personhood to human beings as such – at least to those considered fully human, which would exclude slaves, and even leave women and children in a subordinate ranking. Accordingly, we find the term in Roman Law referring no longer just to the actors in dramatical presentations, but also to the civic "actors" in the dramas of the Roman Republic, and then later of the Empire.

The *persona* becomes the human being seen as *subject* of rights and duties, according to the role he is expected to play in the civic order of society. Although only free men fully enjoyed such privileges, they already far outnumbered the *dramatis personae* of the ancient theater. The idea of *persona* was expanding the circle of its referents. This was a significant step in the new semantic framework, ultimately surpassing functional definitions in order to designate, in terms both abstract and universal, potentially all beings possessed of a human nature, full stop. Without this advance in law and jurisprudence, we would not have seen, at least not in such a swift and logical evolution, the further unfolding of the notion.

The Moral Person

With the Greek translation of the Old Testament (starting in the third century BC), followed by its Latin translation (completed by St. Jerome at the turn of the fifth century), together with the dissemination of the New Testament (first in Greek, then in Latin), Jewish and Cristian scholars began to negotiate the exegetical challenges of the first chapters of Genesis (original sin, temptation). The latter also pondered the Christian theology of sin and the liberty to which men are called according to the Epistles of St. Paul ("it was for liberty that Christ freed us," Gal. 5,1). A vision of the human individual as bearer of dignity and rights, and such as are no longer linked exclusively to one's role in society, but rather to one's nature – independently of sex, ethnicity or social status – brought a more comprehensive understanding of the human subject. That subject now not only carried civic and juridical incumbencies (defined in written law and founded on an ever-growing articulation of 'natural law'), but on a far deeper and inalienable level, was endowed with a freedom deriving from their nature, and a corresponding moral responsibility.

Although Augustine originally demurred on the matter of full female dignity and rights, he later would clearly affirm it, and do so explicitly on the authority of the Biblical narrative (*De Trin.*, c. 7). Nonetheless, a mature development of a philosophical and theological anthropology of the person still remained in the shadows of a parallel discourse, more prominent in the first centuries (and in no small way due to Augustine himself), namely: the

question of the *soul* and the defense of its immortality and spirituality. Even so, one of the most crucial advances in this question will be the growing acknowledgment that the intellectual and free soul is indeed inherently, and nonnegotiable personal.

The Theological Turning Point

The idea of personhood begins to assume metaphysical relevance and centrality only in the fourth and fifth centuries. It follows naturally from efforts to forge more exact formulations, in the Greek language, of the key mysteries of Christian theology. Theology, as philosophy, deals predominantly with distinctions. The new metaphysical profile of personhood emerges first in the midst of theological discussions regarding the conceptual identification of certain distinctions (in terms of ‘relations’) within the Divinity itself. Although Greek philosophy will be invited indeed to offer its services, this tricky matter of inner-divine discriminations is held to be occasioned, not by abiding too long in the pages of Plato or Aristotle, but, and unavoidably, through the manifest words of Biblical testimony.

Scripture appears, at the very least, to presuppose an ontological trinity, clearly exhibiting divine prerogatives not only in the Old Testament Father, but also in the Jesus of the Gospel and in the Spirit of the Acts and the Epistles. But this three-ness is one that suggests a *non*-mathematical triad, a metaphysical triangulation of ‘hypostases’ – of what will become known as divine ‘Persons.’ At the same time, and within the selfsame logic of the Trinitarian Absolute, the challenge of speaking of a ‘Man-God’ – likewise prompted by the Gospel – led to an identification, within the figure of Jesus, of a single subject, but one existing in two distinct natures.

As was the case with the origin of the first notion of *prosopon*/*persona* in Greek and Latin – at least a millennium earlier – here too the morphological resources of these two great Indo-European languages would step forth to articulate ideas that had never been spoken before by human tongues. The first four ecumenical councils of Niceia (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) would consecrate Greek terms of unmistakable philosophical pedigree as points of obligatory reference for the remaining history of Christian theology: for the nature (essence) of both God and man, the words *physis* or *ousia* (in Latin, *natura* or *essentia*), which attend to the question ‘What is it?’; and for the subject, that is, the one who possesses that nature, responding to the question ‘Who is it?’, the words *hypostasis* or *prosopon* (in Latin, *suppositum*/*subsistentia* or *persona*).

Consequently, in this updated theological language, God is three *prosopa* or *hypostases* in only one *physis* or *ousia*; and Christ, in turn, is one *prosopon*, or *hypostasis* in two *ousie* or *physes*. The doctrine of the Trinity and of the Incarnation of the Word find, at long last, their canonical

articulations. We should recall, of course, that all such definitions, together with the authority they hold for the Church, do not ‘explain’ the mysteries, but only outline the bounds within which they can be conceived of, or pointed to without falling into confusion or error. The definitions are like the curbs in the road that leads to final truth, laid down in order to keep us on that trajectory, and to avoid falling into the mental mud on either side of the path. As theologians will point out, such dogmas are not the end-stations of thought, but rather the launching pads.

Although this new vocabulary slowly gains consensus among theologians, it still remained onerous for the human intellect to grasp the full meaning of the conciliar determinations, and especially to promulgate them among those who simply, and quite understandably, disagreed (like Arians, Nestorians and Monophysites). The first careful theological treatments came with St. Athanasius’s *De incarnatione Verbi Dei* (fourth century) on the Incarnation, and St. Augustine’s *De trinitate* (fifth century) on the Trinity. It was in particular Augustine who further enriched the notion of person by introducing an Aristotelian category into the discussion, namely *pros ti* (in Latin, *relatio*), that is, allowing a distinction of the Persons of the Trinity through what he will call “distinctions based on relation.” Much later, Thomas Aquinas would point out what he seems to have held to be the reason for the counterintuitive character of the Trinity, but also what would keep us shy of tritheism. It is the fact that relations, which form the weakest of the categories in Aristotle (called by Thomas himself: *ens minimum*, the least of beings), paradoxically provide us with the best conceptual approach to what the Divine Persons actually are, namely, ‘subsistent relations.’

The lower we go in the hierarchy of being, the looser and more tenuous the relations that hold things together become. We know today, better than ever, that the entire cosmos lies in a web of complex relations – Newton’s understanding of gravity is just the most famous example – but that all the relations are folded into ceaseless motions and changes. At perhaps the most basic level, a great physicist discovered the electron, over a century ago, and called it a particle, but then his own son, 30 years later, discovered the electron was also a wave (J. J. and George Thomson). Both received Nobel prizes. Neils Bohr will famously say that the opposite of a correct statement may be a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.

Interrelations, motion, change, finitude and contingency – all are hallmarks of our material world. But the relations themselves, often only communicable in mathematics, seem like thin, barely substantive latticework. Relations among humans are more mysterious yet, but somehow also more laden with density, meaning and consequence. If we dared to peek into the world of the angels, we would find relations grown even more powerful

and connective, the immaterial world showing itself to be arguably the true homeland of relation. So it is that in God, the fragile relations of the universe are reverse-reflected in the intimate, eternally subsistent relations that are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The feeble little category of 'relation' enters the big time. Here too, the last became the first. Our idea of person – so inseparable from a profound and intricate understanding of relation – was already on the way to its destined rendezvous with metaphysics.

All of the first Church councils were held geographically in the Byzantine world and linguistically in the Greek language. It would take centuries for these declarations to achieve full and coherent metaphysical exposition in Latin. The pragmatic and yet poetic tongue of the Romans gained philosophical profundity only after centuries of submission to Greek ideas and the circumspect translations of its terms (through intermediaries such as Cicero and later Tertullian). But the social implications of all this theorizing did not take long to drip down into the population at large. In moral terms, it would no longer be theologically sustainable to doubt that behind all the differences of sex, age, skin color and vocation lies a subject, an agent endowed with reflexive consciousness and free will, and which bore the greatest responsibility imaginable: that of deciding for or against God. This growing consciousness would provoke the first careful arguments known to history in favor of the abolition of slavery (fourth century Gregory of Nyssa already comments that no one but God can own a human being), and the improvement of the social condition of women. The gradual transition of slavery to serfdom in the Middle Ages, together with ever greater appreciation of the special dignity of women (notably advanced by the cult of Mary), would flow seamlessly from this slow resolution of the full meaning of personhood.

In summary, beyond the dramaturgical person we met in Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the person as bearer of rights and obligations we found in Roman law, the moral person appears as the real maker and shaker of a history turned Christian. Its general characterization and metaphysical flowering now began to expand, first in theory and then ever more in practice, seen increasingly as the only true realization of a human nature where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female" (Gal. 3, 28).

The Metaphysical Person

In modern thought, ever since the introduction of the Cartesian *cogito*, philosophical attention has gravitated strongly to the person as subject of consciousness and of cognitive and volitional acts. Such acts even came to be seen, more and more, as constituents not only of our knowledge, but even more fatefully as determinant dimensions of the very world that surrounds

us (as in German Idealism). Without dismissing the conquests regarding the fiscal and moral subject – and to some degree even touching upon the dramaturgical masks (since modern philosophy, to a great extent, presumes to unmask human subjectivity) – modern philosophy has tended to leap-frog over the great theoretical advances attained during the medieval period. Since we usually pay for our forgetfulness, it has only been in the twentieth century – the bloodiest century of human history, with communist and fascist collectivisms resulting in the sacrifices of tens of millions of people in *gulags*, ethnic cleansings, eugenic projects and concentration camps – that intellectuals began to appreciate the need for greater clarity in our ways of thinking about human dignity and human rights. To many it became clear that what was truly needed was to find the means of establishing these truths above and beyond the ever-shifting ideologies of modernity.

The considerable contributions of the medieval centuries to artistic, scientific, philosophical and theological culture began to be studied and appreciated already in the 19th century. A benchmark of this in the 20th century was the invitation of one of the world's foremost Thomists, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), to take part in the elaboration of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promulgated in 1948. The growing appropriation of the metaphysical dimensions of the human person would likewise lead to more nuanced and better-grounded framing of moral, juridical and political questions too. (see Wojtyla, 2011; Walsh, 2016). As always, St. Augustine had pointed the way. But it was in the 13th century that those dimensions were first brought fully and explicitly to the attention of philosophers and theologians.

2. Personhood in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas

Let us hasten directly to Aquinas's most compact affirmation regarding the status of personhood: "A person is that which is most perfect in all of nature (*perfectissimum in tota natura*)."

(*Summa Theol.* I, 29, a. 3). Before we suspect that Thomas may be stating this for confessional, religious reasons, or worse yet, sentimental motives, we should emphasize that despite the undeniable influence of the definitions and clarifications of the councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon, that which clearly led Thomas to make this pointed declaration were arguments of a purely metaphysical nature. Even though he treats amply of God, of angel and of man (the three modalities of personhood in the Christian universe), identifying each one as irreducibly personal, the strongly analogical nature of the notion – with realizations profoundly different although obviously kindred – some questions are still left unresolved, especially in the exceptional case of the human person, with its amphibious existence in two worlds: spiritual and material.

Some scholars have labored long over this issue, and a first synthesis of Thomas's understanding of the analogical notion of person has been advanced. I refer especially to the works of Norris Clarke (Clarke, 1995), Karl Wojtyla (1979) and, most recently, of Mark K. Spencer (Spencer, 2022), to mention only three of many, and – particularly in what regards comparisons which we will address presently regarding related notions in the East – by Richard De Smet (De Smet, 2010; 2013). The works of these four philosophers offer a new and promising outline of what Aquinas might have written about the human person, had he enjoyed a few more years of life and been able to join his multiple reflections – spread out through many of his works – into a single treatise or *quaestio*.

The first matter to which we should draw our attention is that Thomas considers the person not, in the first instance, to be a psychological subject, to which today we might associate the term 'personality.' For him, the *cogito* of Descartes would be at best a derivative finding, and not a primitive intuition. True, Descartes also *arrives* at this principle, but he finally grants it a kind of sovereignty over all else we know that is quite alien to Thomas's view that the touchstone of truth will always be out there, in *tota natura*. Accordingly, the person is considered, first and foremost, a kind of *being*, a mode of *existence*, and one which demonstrably exhibits and lays claim to three salient characteristics: 1) "incommunicability" in its act of being (*Summa*, q. 29, 3 ad 4); 2) Reflexivity and autonomy in its characteristic operations (*ibid.* q. 79; 82-3); and 3) self-transcendence in the depth and scope of its relations (*ibid.*). We shall present each of these properties as following from the definition which Thomas inherits – and ends up significantly editing – from Boethius, namely: 'an individual substance of a rational nature - *rationalis naturae individua substantia*.' Thomas tends to honor traditional definitions and, if he judges them incomplete or misleading in some respect, will usually present his emended version as a sort of polite commentary, or a mere iteration 'in other words.'

In the case of this definition, there is an obvious effort to keep the analogical amplitude of the notion sufficiently open so as to be applicable not only to humans, but also to God and the angels. The notion of an 'individual substance' is not totally erroneous when applied to God, for what could be more substantial and more 'individual' – in the rigorous sense of these words – than God; still, 'substance' as a philosophical notion is commonly paired with a correlative notion, that of accident. Since God, however, is subject to no accident, Thomas chooses the nominal verb 'subsistent' (*subsistens* in Latin, perhaps best rendered as 'a subsistent being') to replace substance, thus preserving the reality and entity in the meaning, but without the implication of subjection to accidents.

Beyond this adjustment, Thomas found the adjective 'rational' similarly open to equivocation, for like the angels, God is not, in the precise sense of the term, *rational* (discursive, inferential), but rather *intellectual*. Rationality as such is proper only to humans and is due to our bond with matter and thus our need to think along a temporal axis, and accordingly produce discourse – from principles to applications, from premises to conclusions, from one thing to another. Only in this way can a human mind secure most of its objects of knowledge.

It is not like this with beings that are fully immaterial because their spirituality allows, or better, requires the mode of intuitive access to *all* they know. Thus, "rational" in Boethius's definition is substituted by 'intellectual.' Of course even human knowledge possesses a certain dimension of intellectual, intuitive knowledge, but it is restricted principally to what we call first principles. And there are precious few of these. Therefore, the Thomist iteration of the Boethian definition becomes simpler and more exact: 'a subsistent being of an intellectual nature.'

'Incommunicability' – having little or nothing, by the way, to do with communication in its colloquial sense – means that a person is a complete totality unto itself, an ontologically focused individual, unrepeatable and insusceptible of duplication – today we would have to add: not even 'cloneable'; biology recognizes that even if we were to succeed in cloning a human being, the result would not be a carbon copy, as it were, of the selfsame person, but merely a sort of identical twin (although, rather bizarrely, of differing age). Personhood in its very being cannot be 'communicated to,' or shared with anything or anyone else. It is self-possessed in the most intimate way possible. It is its own nontransferable 'property,' one might say. We can certainly generate children and communicate to them our human nature, but it would be quite another matter to communicate our personal identity, making out of a 'you' a 'me.' A person is quite simply, and from its inception, a being of such density, particularity and individuality that there can exist only *one* of them.

Probably the most common way of referring to a beloved spouse or lover is to bear witness to this singularity. How often do we hear in romantic exchanges, or in love songs, the phrase 'only *you*'? As usual, the poets get the message before the philosophers. This metaphysical incommunicability, in truth, is the very condition of possibility for persons to exercise another, supremely important form of communication. It enables them to be able to communicate themselves indeed, but here not ontologically, *but in will*, making a gift of themselves in the act of love. After all, you can only give what you have, and persons, in the order of being, possess themselves in the most perfect way possible; consequently, in the order of free acts, they can give what they have to the beloved: their very selves. Love – whether family

affection, erotic love, friendship or the love that Christ taught – produces not a fusion of being (a melting of two into one), but rather a communion of wills, a gift of bodies (in simple corporeal presence or in sexual intimacy) and finally a union of lives. Even in the most intimate of acts of love, involving an embrace, the lovers remain two; they do not fuse into a four-legged creature. The special nature of all these personal acts that build upon our ontological uniqueness leads us to our second attribute.

Operational reflexivity means that the acts proper to persons as persons – namely, their intellectual and volitional acts – are *theirs* in a form so intimate that, in great measure, the agent and the recipient of the act tend to coincide in the order of intention. Persons are designed to have such complete dominion over their acts, and act so perfectly by and through themselves, that they also end up acting *upon* themselves. This is the famous *reditio completa* ('complete return'), an expression Thomas borrows from the Neo-Platonists (as in his commentary of the *Liber de causis*), integrating this idea with his Aristotelian psychology and metaphysics. Only persons dispose of these perfectly 'reflexive' acts, that is to say, acts that emerge from the subject but also return to it and abide within it; or, in other words, these are not transient acts, that only act upon some exterior object, but *immanent* operations, that remain *within* the subject and change it – and, if performed within the moral order, perfect it.

We can formulate this characteristic in the following way: both in the cognitive field and in the appetitive field, a person produces operations that, in a certain sense, are 'retroactive,' and end up transforming the subject as much as, or even more, than whatever object might be involved. The whole Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of *hexis* (habit, disposition) and *areté* (virtue, excellence), developed to such sophistication in the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa*, it became the dimension of Thomist philosophy that exhibits the most multifaceted fecundity. Virtues (and vices) take up most of the hundreds of pages of the text. This is why the second part of his opus magnum grows into such a monster, finally being divided into two. Personal knowledge does not only regard exterior objects, but also the person itself and its complex relations with the world around it. Objects indeed are known in such cases, but in knowing them, a person also matures in its knowledge of itself. And the order of the appetites similarly exhibits a spiritual and intellectual summit, likewise acting upon the agent of the free acts: for the will necessarily wills its own good, thereby loving itself, which is the curious condition of possibility for loving others ('love your neighbor as you love yourself').

The properties of this triad are interdependent among themselves. When segregated from each other, they are quickly corrupted. The dense individuality of the person in its incommunicability in being could, when

orphaned from the other properties, create existential isolation, with the person morphing into a sort of padlocked monad, where its God-created uniqueness becomes a jail cell of weirdness. But this is only if it retreats from the open windows provided by the reflexive operations, and in sequence, from the resulting deep webs of relations that makes true self-transcendence possible. In like manner, reflection on its own existence in self-consciousness, and the tendency to affirm its own good (that is, happiness) in self-determination, could culminate in a closed cycle of narcissism. But this would be our fate if there did not exist a personal dynamism directly outwardly. The senses have already opened the soul to a world of visions, sounds, smells, tastes and the most varied sensorial impressions. The intellect and the will, rooted in the unique individuality of the person, are designed to follow the senses and open themselves to a virtual infinity of relations. Transcendence is, so to speak, the very language of human ontology.

There are three great transcendences in our experience. The first is the one created by our senses, which display a material world that stretches far beyond our body, a function of the celebrated *In-der-Welt-Sein* (the radical 'in-the-worldness' of our experience) of Heidegger. Thereafter, when this world has already activated the intellect through its manifestation of the truth of things (their intelligibility), and the will through the disclosure of the goodness of things (their 'appetability,' 'interest,' 'importance'), the mind itself will respond by its own transcendence – this time, a transcendence of the very material world itself. The mind discovers essences, properties, structures and principles that surpass the material order (the mathematical order of truths – within, but also somehow beyond the physical cosmos – gives witness to this). The third transcendence arises when the dynamism of the spirit finally identifies an absolute 'beyond,' to which the name of God will be given. Nothing in the world hitherto encountered will ultimately make sense without this mysterious reality 'that we call God' (in the words of Aquinas in his famous Five Ways – his extremely understated way of referring to God insofar as philosophically knowable, for it points merely to an existence, the essence of which we know next to nothing; but of which we can indeed know that it is *there*).

The density of personal being and the intensity of its operations makes it profoundly *itself*, possessed of the purest form of 'identity' that exists, but it is an ID that is programmatically *open* and interrelated to *others*, and potentially to everything and everyone (*capax universi*, able to be face-to-face with everything, in the expression of Aquinas). There is a kind of intentionality (a 'being-about-something-elseness') that is not only true of our reflexive acts of cognition and appetite, but of our very being. Persons do not just exist, but they are also *about* something greater than themselves. You might have a book and know a lot about the book, but not know what

the book is about. A human person – so incommunicable, reflective and self-transcendent – is already a remarkable creature. But it is also a question, for it is *about* something more than what it is. We persons *are* ourselves, but we are not *about* ourselves.

3. Atman and Brahman in the Vedanta: Personal or Impersonal?

The religions and philosophies of India are innumerable. After long and serious debates about the fittingness of the singular noun ‘Hinduism’ as a name for so diverse a multitude of religious manifestations in art, wisdom and cult, the consensus of specialists tends to honor the pragmatic need to keep the term in the singular, so long as we bear in mind the profound heterogeneity of the subject matter at hand. Beneath the anfractuous boundary lines between the schools and cults we call Hindu, there is a relatively uncontentious unifying formula linking the majority of manifestations of Indian religiosity, and even of its several (one usually counts six) ‘schools’ of philosophy. And even though some would deem the formula to imply a usurpation of a point of view salient in only one of those scholastic formulations (one of the six *darshanas*), namely, the Vedanta – entailing a possible marginalization of other, comparably influential schools – it is hard to dispute that, at the very least, the Hindu view of reality of greatest projection in the West does indeed carry the stamp of this formula’s manner of conceiving of the world, of man and of God.

This core *Weltanschauung* represents an interpretation of the Vedas and Upanishads that had considerable impact also beyond the members of a specific school, even if at times more implicitly than explicitly. It is the formula extracted from the *Chandogya* Upanishad (6,8.7), commented upon in all the schools of Vedanta, but in the most familiar and radical form in the *Advaita* (‘non-dualist’) Vedanta. The familiar expression is: *tat tvam asi* (“that thou are”), affirming the identity between what you, as a human being, truly are, and that which the world, in its totality and in its fundamental reality, truly is. At a certain level, it denotes an ultimate fusion between subject and object. The formulations of this fusion are, however, extraordinarily subtle, and – rehearsing what Augustine had said about knowing God (if you think it is God you understand, it is not) – if you think you understand the *tat tvam asi*, you probably do not.

This *mahavakya* (‘grand declaration’) from a canonical text of Indian metaphysics serves for many as a kind of *leitmotif*, in one form or another, of the many-splendored array of Indian philosophies and religions, at least to the extent that they point to our end and final consummation. That end is sought by all, whether through philosophical thought, in the postures and breaths of yoga, by virtue of the sacrifices and ritual exercises of *bhakti* (‘devotion’), or by one’s understanding of the slow justice of transmigration

(whatever form it may take). These, and other lineages of meditation and Hindu practice, even if they do not display a manifest recognition of this metaphysical ‘bottom line,’ nonetheless can be seen to implicitly acknowledge it as a common denominator. Most of the diverse aspects of Indian culture contain a soteriological outlook – that is, keep the final realization of human being always in mind – and, if asked about the nature of this final emancipation so ardently coveted, will often respond with some speculative or performative variation on the *tat tvam asi*.

Even the language of Sanskrit inserts itself into this soteriological context and, in principle, is learned and studied not solely as a means of communication, but rather as one more instrument of liberation (*moksa*). Still, one great matter of contestation in the whole Indian tradition (whether Hindu, Buddhist or even Jain), and one which particularly perplexes Western commentators, concerns *what it is*, or even more precisely, *who it is*, that will inherit, experience or be in some way the recipient or “proprietor” of this freedom. Can *moksa* be freedom if there is no one, or no thing to enjoy it?

There exists a standard Hindu word for the world inasmuch as it is bereft of ways, directions and intrinsic destinations. As such, this ‘lost world’ constitutes our prison. There is a vast literature that attempts to describe this non-teleological ambience called *samsara* (which could be translated as, simply ‘that which goes and goes, but goes nowhere’). It is precisely from *samsara* that the Hindu typically seeks liberation, but descriptions of the final state *in the interest of which* such liberation exists, does not enjoy, so to speak, a fully developed phenomenology.

On the one hand, it can be said that silence prevails in this matter simply because no description is possible, the state being inherently ineffable (the New Testament says much the same thing about heaven, 1 Cor. 2, 9). However, a prior question that presupposes some measure of stability does inevitably hover over any discourse regarding liberation: again, *who*, or *what* is the subject of such liberation? Again, freedom can hardly be a reality without the existence of some possible recipient or beneficiary, who would in fact be freed. Who, or what would that be? Our rather spontaneous response, without a doubt, would be: well.... persons. But do we have the right to respond in this way in a *samsaric* universe? The answer is not simple.

It stands to reason that there will be words in all languages – including Sanskrit, and despite what the philosophers or religious pundits may say – that designate, more or less approximately, what we mean in Western tongues by ‘person.’ As already mentioned, English exhibits a whole menu of terms like subject, individual, yourself, agent, guy, self, dude, etc.; similarly Sanskrit has *pudgala* (‘person’ or maybe ‘persona’), *jiva* (‘individual’), *atman* (the

‘yourself’ or ‘soul’), *purusha* (‘spirit,’ ‘subject’), *deha* (“embodied person), *tanu* (another possible word for ‘person’ in general). All these words point, in various ways, to this idiosyncratic creature that we are. The *tat tvam asi*, however, and in particular a comparable *mahavakya* – namely: *aham Brahmasmi* (‘I am Brahman,’ repeated in some Upanishads) – present a personal destiny that seems to involve either an outright metamorphosis, or, even more radically, a complete cessation of human existence as such and the inauguration of an absolute and divine existence in its place.

An image comes to mind – much used in the East and in more mystical, though marginal modes of expression even in the West – of the drop of water that falls into the sea. Under the sway of such a metaphor, the distinction between creature and God, so crucial for Semitic theologies, would appear, at the very least, to be in danger of losing its force, and even its relevance. Accusations of pantheism, or monism, have been made more than once by Occidental commentators, dismayed by what seems to be a strident violation of the claims of exclusivity made for God in the Abrahamic traditions. We recall the *Shema Yisrael* of the Hebrews (‘Thou shalt have no other God besides me!’), and of the fundamental commandment in Christianity to love God above all things and not pretend to be him (or in the paraphrase of Chesterton ‘...we are commanded to love God and not to be God’). Moreover, it would appear to exemplify, with sacrilegious bravado, the most egregious of sins in the Muslim world, namely: *shirk*, the imputing to a creature of attributes that belong solely to God.

But a couple of considerations might help to quiet these misgivings. To begin with, there already exists in Christianity – although admittedly more conspicuous in its Eastern domains – a reference to what Western Catholics and Protestants might prefer to call ‘sanctification,’ but which others in the Christian tradition openly, and with some Scriptural and Patristic cachet, call *theosis* (*deificatio* in Latin: ‘deification’ or ‘divinization’). No less an authority than the pillar of doctrinal orthodoxy himself, St. Athanasius, dares to utter the following in his *De incarnatione* (54, 3): ‘the Son of God became man so that we might become God.’

Nonetheless, emphatic reservations, or at least qualifications, are not hard to come by, especially by appealing to a famous Platonic term, used also in the New Testament. It provides another approach to expressing this change. The word is *methexis* (‘participation’). Scripture indeed calls us to be ‘participants in the divine nature.’ (2 Peter 1, 4) Even if the Western Church prefers to underplay expressions as stark as ‘divinization,’ it is undeniable that the term is a part of Biblical and Patristic tradition, even in Latin theology (particularly evident in the fourteenth century German theologian, Meister Eckhardt). The potential, and probably inevitable polemic lying within the mystery of our ultimate union with God will

return again and again in theological discussion. The silver, intelligible lining around mysteries may grow thicker with time, but the dark core will probably only begin to shine in eternity.

It is the second consideration, however, which is most relevant to the matter of personal being. It regards, especially in Thomas Aquinas, the discernment both of *theosis* in Orthodox theology and, potentially, the *tat tvam asi* in the Vedanta. When Thomas develops his philosophical anthropology (most pointedly in the last *quaestiones* of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*), he highlights a famous *mahavakya* of Aristotle – oh yes, we have those in the West too! – formulated in a declaration not less surprising that *tat tvam asi*. It would be no exaggeration to even consider it a kind of Greek translation of the famous upanishadic claim. The great Macedonian philosopher affirms that, due to its intellectual nature, the human soul is, in a certain way, *all existing things* (*De anima*, III, 8, 431b 20-21).

Just as the hand is the ‘tool of tools’ inasmuch as it lacks the form of any of the tools it will take to itself, and due to this very lack is able to invite any of them into its grasp, the Scholastics will say that the soul is similarly the ‘form of forms’ in the world of intellectual knowledge. It can ‘become’ all things precisely because it is not any one of them. To put the paradox in the boldest form possible: it can become all precisely because, in a certain sense, it is nothing. We might add the image of clay, which similarly can ‘become all things’ because it does not possess a proper form. How much more so can the soul become all things, for being immaterial, it possesses a pure and complete openness and receptivity for everything else, far more than clay.

Now, *if* it is a fundamental openness and the absence of a fixed ‘identity’ which the most Western of thinkers (Aristotle and Aquinas) attribute to intellectual souls, and – something which amounts to the same thing, since every intellectual soul is personal – to persons, and that it is this deficit of attributes which is essential for the making of a true person; and beyond this, *if* the person is *perfectissimum in tota natura*, it appears not only possible, but necessary that the very Godhead be personal.

This is already stock-in-trade in the Abrahamic traditions, but the tendency in Advaita Vedanta – and in particular, in its most influential articulation, that of Shankara of the ninth century – is to attribute ‘personal’ properties to God (or *Brahman*) *only* insofar as that ultimate reality is turned towards us, donning those qualities (*gunas*) that make it approachable to a limited mind and merely as accommodations to our cognitive needs (thus, *saguna*, ‘with attributes’). In this case, *Brahman* in itself – according to this reading of Vedanta – in absolute terms, would possess no attribute at all, and, *a rigueur*, would not therefore be personal. But is this the only reading true to the Upanishads and even to the intentions of Shankara? If we

understand personal being outside of the context of modern philosophy, and instead according to the medieval tradition presented earlier in this essay, we might find that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and indeed of the New Testament, would be also, and necessarily ‘without attributes,’ and yet, at the same time and under the same metaphysical necessity, be the supreme instance, even the exemplar, of true personhood.

The Scholastics continue to follow Aristotle in affirming that in intellectual knowledge, we become, in a certain way, that which we know. Naturally, this ‘in a certain way’ (in Aristotle, *pōs*, translated into Latin as *quodammodo*) must be taken on board as we negotiate the radical nature of the statement. But the New Testament itself offers its own commentary (1 Cor. 13, 12 and 1 John 3, 2), when it says: ‘...we will see [God] face to face...and I will know as I am known,’ and ‘...we will resemble him, for we will see him as he is.’ And of course we have Psalm 82, sung all over the Christian world: ‘I said: You are Gods.’ (Ps. 82, 6) And before we write it off as Hebrew hyperbole, we must then ask why, if it was such a potentially misleading phrase, would St. John put the offending quote on the Savior’s lips? (John 10, 34) The difficulty in accommodating the paradox and in making coherent sense of any complete creaturely union with God is quite simply because the reality of this union is – for Christian as much as for Hindu – a mystery. ‘Behold we have offered you a mystery ... we shall all be changed’ (1 Cor. 15, 51). Of course, so much more could be written about his, but what we have outlined above should be enough – to use a Jain metaphor – to find a few fords in the Indus River.

4. *Anatman* in Buddhism: What is being Negated?

When we turn to Buddhism in the attempt to find common ground between notions of personal identity in Thomism and the East, we come before a challenge that is, in effect, the inverse of what accosts us in Hinduism. In Buddhist philosophy, it will not be so much the ‘ontological’ tendency of fusing or confusing creature with God – after all, God hardly figures in most expositions of the Buddhist *dharma* – but instead an ‘epistemological’ constraint in the use of our conceptual and linguistic resources in formulating the problem. In other words, in lieu of a metaphysical offensive, Buddhism will make an issue out of our use of language and our cognitive claims, and – of interest to us here – of our very efforts to affirm something positive about the nature, or even the existence of the human person. Instead of threatening to make the person vanish like a drop of water in the Indian Ocean, it will preempt the menace before it can even threaten us. In a vanguard maneuver, the Buddhist will typically deconstruct our very possibility of thinking or speaking coherently about an abiding personal identity. In its most familiar articulations, this will take the form of a bold negation of the very existence

of the *atman*. Buddhism can even be characterized as The Tradition of *Anatman* (or in Pāli, *anatta*, ‘non-self’ or ‘non-substantiality’).

The abundance of reflections and the intensity of debates over this notion during the long and complex history of the multiple Buddhist ‘vehicles’ (formulations, traditions), and the often divergent and at times even contradictory answers to the question as to what the precise target of negation is, need not be detailed for the present purposes of this essay. We need only highlight the reigning consensus that *anatman* plays a central and indispensable role in the teachings of the Buddha. Within the limits of comparative philosophy – matching and contrasting, as we are doing here, the Thomist, Vedantin and Buddhist takes on personhood – it makes sense to isolate the question and seek clarification of the possible meanings of this so crucial term.

Of the three characteristics the Buddha identifies as inherent in all that we encounter in our experience – the so-called *trilakshana* (‘three marks’): *anitya* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering, dissatisfaction), and *anatman* (the absence of substantiality, of “selfhood” within all things, including human reality) – the *anatman* seems to be the most original and fundamental property. It would be the very lack of enduring substantiality, after all, which would give rise to impermanence to begin with; and suffering too would find its roots here, since lack of stable entity implies that nothing – nothing at all – can offer a fixed point of support and abiding satisfaction. The question to be asked is simply the following: Is it the case that this negation of substantiality, the repudiation of *atman*, logically requires a categorically metaphysical interpretation in order that it constitute an integral and coherent part of the Buddha’s teaching?

Cannot *anatman*’s negation of *atman* also be interpreted – and be *coherently* interpreted – in ways that are 1) epistemological, 2) soteriological, 3) anthropological, and 4) moral, without treading on metaphysical turf? Such explanations would not be entirely new, it is true, but in the wake of a flood of recent Buddhological studies of a tradition that is nothing if not complex – especially in the last 50 years or so – we do find intelligent voices that endorse such a non-metaphysical reading. They may be in the minority, but they are well-argued and hard to ignore (e.g., Pérez-Remón, 1980; Hamilton, 2000; Gombrich, 2009). A small number of respected Buddhist gurus, such as A.P. Buddhadatta (1887-1962) and Thanissaro Bhikkhu (*1949), along with non-Buddhist Hindu scholars, such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1988-1975) and A. K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), have likewise endorsed this approach as in full harmony with the Buddha’s *sūtras*.

In one of the first of these sayings attributed to Buddha, one of his disciples famously asks if the world is eternal or temporal, infinite or finite, and if the soul and the body are the same thing or two different things, and

if an enlightened person continues to exist after death, or not. The master promptly replies with the parable of the poisoned arrow. He judges any disciple who concerns himself with these questions to be like someone struck by a such an arrow, but who wants to know all about the origin and proprietor of the projectile, its length and composition, the type of bow that dispatched it and the intentions of the shooter, and yet fails to address the only essential question at hand: how to get the arrow out of his flesh.

In this and other *sutras*, the Buddha insists on the futility of metaphysical, theoretical questions and the contrasting urgency of obtaining efficacious means of awakening and enlightening the mind. When he does respond a bit more affirmatively to the question regarding the *atman*, if it exists eternally or will finally cease to be, he still gives a neatly ambiguous answer, stating that it neither will exist nor cease to exist. This aversion to metaphysics, at least in the earliest articulations of the tradition, seems clearly to extend itself not only to ontological affirmations (such as ‘God exists’ or ‘the soul exists’), but equally to ontological negations (‘God does not exist’ or ‘there is no soul’). This makes sense, since by negating God or the soul, the philosopher is also laying claim to metaphysical knowledge. He presumes to be able to *know* that such realities cannot or do not exist. Whether affirming or negating, you would be falling into futile metaphysics. Such would seem to be the Buddha’s position. After all, you would have to know a lot about water not only to make sense of the ocean, but also to make sense of a desert.

Accordingly, it would seem to be more in sync with the skeptical, or better, agnostic tenor of the Buddha’s instructions to interpret the meaning of the negation of *atman* not in positive, ontological, but rather in more subjective, circumstantial terms, such as the following:

Epistemologically: Here the Buddha would agree with Dionysius the (Pseudo)Areopagite and with the whole Christian apophatic tradition (even with certain statements of Thomas Aquinas) that all use of language to speak affirmatively about God, or *Brahman*, is in the end to no avail and misleading, and that it would be more coherent to hold our peace and, with Wittgenstein, remain silent about things about which we *cannot* speak. Christian theologians will of course accept that beyond the few metaphysical statements one can make without the aid of supernatural revelation – as in the Five Ways, about ‘the one we call God’ – there are also new dimensions that have been made known to us precisely through revelation, and especially through the life, words and Paschal Mystery of Christ. But short of this, they will also recognize the truth of that apophatic emphasis (or ‘negative theology’) they share with Buddhists. Therefore, through this optic, a Christian reading of *anatman* could simply agree that

yes, there is no intrinsic reality (especially of the soul or of God) to which we have direct cognitive access. This would mean merely that *it does not exist as knowable*. This form of agnosticism we find, *ceteris paribus*, even in Aquinas, who once stated that “the highest knowledge that we can have of God is to know that we do not know him” (...*illud est ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo quod sciat se Deum nescire*, De pot., 7,5, ad 14). In his essence he remains wholly unknown (*penitus manet ignotum*. (*Summa c.G.*, 3, 49) And again, we recall how Augustine chides our supposed knowledge of God, declaring: *Si comprehendus, non est Deus* (which we can render as: ‘If you think you have understand [God], it is not God you have understood,’ Sermon 67).

Soteriologically: In terms of liberation or enlightenment, the Buddhist will tend to view all speculation about *atman* – its nature, its whereabouts, its origin, etc. – to be of no profit at all, even counterproductive, a kind of sterile distraction. Accordingly, we can also understand *anatman* as saying that *in terms of attaining nirvana, there is no atman, the knowledge of which would serve our liberation*. One is reminded of a celebrated Christian saying of Thomas á Kempis, in his *Imitatio Christi*, that he “would prefer to feel repentance than to define it.” Nonetheless, later Buddhism (of Mahayana vintage) will generate libraries of theory and seem to ignore these warnings about overheated cogitation. But no tradition is exempt from occasional mutinies. Still, the Buddhist tradition which, outside of the Tibetan, has most currency in the West, is certainly Zen. And the two major Zen currents, each in a different way, underscore the Buddhist veto of enlightenment through erudition: one current focusses on ‘just sitting’ (that is, patient self-emptying meditation), and the other feeds its adepts *koans*. These little rational puzzles are designed, without pretense, to break the habit of relying on rational explanation. Why? Because reason does not save, and persons (in the West we are wont to call them *rational* animals) are wed to reason.

Anthropologically: In the common Buddhist theory regarding the constitution of human nature – Buddhists seem to theorize much more than we give them credit for! – one is taught that we humans are made up of five *skandhas* (aggregates) – body, sentiments, perceptions, intentions and consciousness (one possible translation) – and that *atman* is conspicuously *not* counted among them, not even as their composite. Therefore, in this way too the Buddhist can affirm that there is no *atman*, for they insist that there exists no dimension of human reality that is *atman*. It’s not there.

Morally: For a Buddhist, affirmations of our permanence, our stability, even of our supposed eternity, will only impair our growth in detachment, and such growth is the great moral goal of Buddhist practice. This practice,

in turn, constitutes an essential dimension of the fourth Noble Truth. Thus, in the interest of moral progress, holding that there is no *atman* can be seen as *virtuous*. *Anatman* becomes a moral practice, a conviction that has power to better us.

Thus we can identify a broad spectrum of possible understandings of the Buddhist negation of *atman* (also applicable to *Brahman*) whereby it retains its power and function, without however sinning against the proscription of metaphysical assertions (whether affirmative or negative). The emphasis on negation in the *dharma* need not logically require, therefore, that the *target* of negation be the very *existence* of an abiding personal and substantial core, a *self*. There are so many aspects of the human complex that, in the process of detachment and Buddhist enlightenment, would have to be deconstructed, one after the other. There is plenty to negate without negating one's very self into the bargain. But in this the Buddhist is not entirely dissimilar to the Christian in his own *via purgativa*. Just read a bit of St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila. However, the Christian will always come back to the very *kataphatic* (affirmative) reality of the Incarnate Word, always in rich interplay with the *apathic* recesses of the Godhead.

With so much conciliation on offer in this essay, it should be emphasized that we are *not* addressing something else. There is a quite distinct and crucial matter in the way of perfection in these two traditions, namely, the *goal* of detachment, or the ultimate reason why one should wish to negate anything to begin with. Here Christianity and Buddhism are far more difficult to harmonize, and the discussion of the divergences would take us too far. It is enough if the present argument has sufficed to show that there need be no requirement, in Buddhism and its body of *sutras*, of directly negating the profound reality of human nature and of a metaphysical personal *self*. Something or someone, in the last analysis, will have to be the proprietor and the subject of genuine purification and maturation, and not merely of negation and annihilation. It may well be that many, maybe most Buddhists will be unable to read their tradition in this light, but it should be a welcome discovery to know that Christians do have means of understanding the Buddhist way that can be harmonized with many of their own beliefs. As for those ultimate ends, however, we must leave that for another essay.

The Colombian philosopher Nicolás Gomez Dávila (1913-94) left us his major philosophical legacy in the form of a text that, counterintuitively, is not really a text at all: *Escolios a un texto implícito* (Scholia on an Implicit Text). The book – of some 1,400 pages – presents itself as scholia, or glossas, in the form of thousands upon thousands of succinct aphorisms, all of them orbiting around a central text that does not explicitly exist. But all these rapid rays and short utterances of wisdom point, unmistakably, to a rich and marvelous *implicit* text, more present perhaps by its absence than

it would be by its presence. One of these proverbs reads: '*Solo la alusión evoca presencias concretas*' (Only allusion evokes concrete presences). This literary strategy offers perhaps the best metaphor to evoke the ultimate meaning of *anatman* in the great Buddhist tradition. All the *sutras* – of whatever lineage of Buddhism – and all the *upayas* ('useful means') that help us attain enlightenment, and even the multiple *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* presented especially in the Mahayana and Pure Land traditions, may be no more than carefully enumerated scholia to an implicit *atman* – an *atman* ineffably present, inevitably presupposed, but for reasons known only to the wise, strategically silenced.

Conclusion

If we are successful in transcending the more superficial layers of the human person, all that we call 'personality' – that is, the 'mask' of our exterior appearance, the public subject that possesses civil rights in the external forum, the moral agent that acts well or badly in the ethical sphere, and the fugitive and capricious focus of our psychological consciousness – perhaps we can also identify what medieval philosophy discovered and arrive at its metaphysical fountainhead. If we recognize the proper identity of our personhood as, in the final analysis, that of a being that subsists in a way that is totally *sui generis* – with ontological incommunicability, operational reflexivity and self-transcendence in its countless relations with the world around it – we might be able to engage fruitfully with the philosophies otherwise so often impenetrable from India and the Far East. This singular reality, 'most perfect in all of nature,' is simultaneously of a density and intensity without equal and of an openness so hospitable that, to a considerable extent, it can assume a face of total transparency: so limpid, it may appear that it is not even there – like a perfect pane of glass, or a lake of crystalline water, revealing all that lies within it and reflecting all that lies beyond it. A perfected person would in a real sense both be there and not be there, perfectly selfless because it has become a perfect self.

Accordingly, we shall close our meditation with a concept we will borrow from the Mahayana tradition (which is, statistically, by far the largest portion of the Buddhist world). In contrast to the Theravada lineage from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, this Buddhism 'of the North' (in China, Korea, Japan and also Tibet) was subjected to strong currents of cross-pollination and hybridization from traditions already well-established in these regions (Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto and Bön). This makes them more complex, to be sure, but even in the array of their *buddhas*, pagodas and rituals, an idea arises that betrays that subtle simplicity so germane to the Buddha's *dharma*.

There is no concept more central to these varied currents than that of *śhunyata* (‘emptiness’). This brings us back not only to the world of Vedānta and of the Hindu Absolute ‘without attributes’ (*nirguna*), mas also to the Biblical world of a Christianity that calls on us to follow an Anointed One who ‘emptied himself’ (Phil. 2, 7), and to the reflections of Aristotle and Aquinas on the spiritual soul that can become all things precisely because devoid of a proper form. Such emptiness would be – for Christian, Hindu and Buddhist alike – a necessary house cleaning for any soul whose destiny is to be ‘full of all the plenitude of God’ (Eph. 3, 19).

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6

Between Identity and Distinction Richard De Smet’s Interpretation of *Tādātmya* in *Advaita Vedānta*

Jacob Antony Palaparambil

Introduction

The metaphysical relation between the Absolute (Brahman) and the empirical world (*jagat*), including the individual self (*jīva*), stands as a foundational problem in *Advaita Vedānta*. Among Śaṅkara’s various doctrinal formulations, the concept of *tādātmya* (the non-reciprocal unity of cause and effect) offers a distinctive approach to resolving this tension without compromising either the transcendence of Brahman or the reality of the world as its dependent manifestation. While traditionally interpreted as a synonym for identity, recent scholarship notably that of Jesuit Indologist Richard De Smet, re-examines *tādātmya* as a more nuanced term indicating an ontological dependence that is intimate, non-dual, yet not reducible to identity.

This article explores De Smet’s interpretation of *tādātmya* in Śaṅkara’s *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* and related texts, focusing on how this relation articulates both metaphysical continuity and ontological asymmetry between *Brahman* and the world. De Smet contends that Śaṅkara’s use of *tādātmya* is better understood not as absolute sameness but as a participatory dependence of the world on the Absolute – a dependence that is non-reciprocal, indwelling, and non-other. Further, this study juxtaposes Śaṅkara’s doctrine

with Aquinas' notion of non-reciprocal relation between Creator and creation, drawing philosophical parallels that enrich the interpretive framework of *Advaitic* causality. In doing so, the article contributes to contemporary *Advaita*-Christian dialogue and advances a metaphysical understanding of the Absolute that is both rigorously non-dual and dynamically relational.

1. The Nature of the Relation between Brahman and the World

According to De Smet the key to understanding the relation and distinction between the *Brahman* and the world/*jīva* can be found in the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (2.2.38) itself where Śaṅkara imagines an opponent asking: "How do you, the *Vedāntins*, establish the relation of cause and effect (between the Lord and the world)? and answers: There is, we reply, no difficulty in our case, as the *relation we assume is that of identity – tādātmyalakṣaṇas ambandhopapatteḥ*."¹ The name given by Śaṅkara to the kind of unity or the relation that exist between the supreme Cause and its effects is called *Tādātmya*.² As for the meaning of the term *tādātmya*, Sara Grant³ notes that the common dictionary definition of the term *tādātmya* stands for *sameness* or *identity of nature* or *character with*, while its cognate adjective *tādātmaka* (from *tādātman*) is defined as 'denoting the unity of nature.'⁴ It is interesting to note that the word '*tādātmya*' does not occur at all in the *Bhagavat-Gītā bhāṣya*, whereas it is found twice in the *Upadeśasāhasrī* and sixteen times in the *Brahmasūtra bhāṣya*. However, a close inspection of all eighteen

1 Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965), 435-436.

2 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Origin: Creation and Emanation," in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 369-82. First published in *Indian Theological Studies* 15, no. 3 (1978): 266-79. Originally presented as a paper at the meeting of the International Society for Metaphysics, Jerusalem, 18-22 August 1977, on the theme "God and the Universe." For further reference Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 435-436.

3 Sara Grant – friend and student of De Smet – a missionary nun of Scottish origin belonging to the congregation of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has done doctorate on the topic, "Śaṅkarācārya's *Concept of Relation*" from the University of Mumbai (India). The topic for research was suggested to her by De Smet who also offered timely suggestions and observations during the course of her study. Cf. Sara Grant, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1999).

4 Grant states that one of the closest meanings of the term '*tādātmya*' is *Absolute Identity*. This term is used often by the *Vedāntins* to explain the union of the *Jīva* with the *Brahman*. In this type of unity, the identity of the *Jīva* is completely lost in *Brahman*. Thus, a *Jīva* after having attained *mokṣa* become one with *Brahman*. However, close study of the word reveals that the meaning provided is inaccurate and insufficient. Cf. Grant, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation*, 130.

instances will suggest that the dictionary definitions are rather less subtle than strict accuracy demands.⁵ As for De Smet, *tādātmya* cannot mean pure identity but can only designate the kind of non-reciprocal relation that binds an effect to its innermost and total Cause. He describes it as, "the tightest kind of unity, short of pure identity, since it subjects the whole being *qua* being to the total Cause which penetrates it most intimately as the Plenitude imbibes the totality of each one of its participations."⁶

As indicated by De Smet, in the *Upaniṣads*, we find many expressions and assertions concerning the relationship between the changing beings of this world and their unchanging cause, *Brahman*. Some of these expressions and assertions incline heavily towards an affirmation of pure identity, while some others emphasize distinction between *Brahman* and his effects.⁷ Nevertheless, when we compare the concept of relation in Śaṅkara and Aquinas, we realise that like Aquinas who regarded the relation between God and creation as a non-reciprocal dependence relation, similar elements of it exist even in Śaṅkara's usage of the term '*tādātmya*.'⁸ Hence De Smet claims, "it is not surprising that the first great systematic *advaitin*, Śaṅkara, choses the term '*tādātmya*' to express the intimate invariable relationship of changing beings with the unchanging *Brahman*."⁹

Though occasionally the term '*tādātmya*' is translated as 'identity,' etymologically and semantically it means 'having that (*tat*) as one's *ātman*.'¹⁰ Whereas, for the etymology of the term '*ātman*,'¹¹ De Smet notes that even today it is controverted. Even when Śaṅkara used the term '*ātman*,' he referred it to three possible verbal roots (*dhātu*) that signified either 'comprehending' or 'engulfing' or 'pervading' and all three referring possessed the idea of 'encompassing' in common.¹² For example in *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (2.1.9) Śaṅkara comments that, "*Brahman* is the *Ātman* of the

5 Cf. Grant, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation*, 130.

6 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Love versus Identity," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (July 1980), 519-26, 523.

7 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Indian Contribution to General Metaphysics," typescript, *Collected Papers B* (1961), 342-60, 352.

8 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Christianity and Śaṅkarācārya," in *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, ed. G. Menachery, vol. 3 (Thrissur: The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, 2010), 3:22-42, 38 and Cf. Richard De Smet, "Christianity and Śaṅkarācārya," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 30, no. 2 (2019), 235-320.

9 Cf. De Smet, "Indian Contribution to General Metaphysics," *Collected Papers B*, 352.

10 Cf. Ivo Coelho, ed., *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2022), 519.

11 Here the term '*ātman*,' is viewed in the context of relation.

12 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 519.

universe, but the universe is not the *Ātman* of *Brahman*.” To understand this more fully, we must first examine ‘the way of causality’ in Śaṅkara.

2. Understanding Causality in Śaṅkara

As claimed by De Smet, “for both Aquinas and Śaṅkara causality is the only gateway to the existent God short of infallible revelation or perfect knowledge.”¹³ In his commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkara described *Brahman* as “absolutely self-sufficient and endowed with all the transcendental perfections, such as Being, Intelligence and Bliss, in an infinite degree. Hence, God alone is Pure, Necessary Being.”¹⁴ Further, in the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (1.1.2) and in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.1.1), *Brahman* is first signified and defined as “that omniscient, omnipotent Cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence and dissolution of this world.”¹⁵

Whereas – in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* – Śaṅkara described creation, sustentation and reabsorption of the world as proceeding from an omniscient, omnipotent Lord, and not from a non-intelligent principle (*pradhāna*).¹⁶ Consequently, for De Smet it is an undeniable fact that for Śaṅkara, the Absolute and the world are existing, but what does it signify? From the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (2.1.14), it is certain that Śaṅkara strongly denied the existence of anything *apart, independently from Brahman*.¹⁷ That is, all realities other than *Brahman*, although they possess a specific existence do not constitute another absolute and self-existence reality but they are one with *Brahman* from Whom, by Whom and in Whom they exist. Again, in *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* (6.2.1) we read that God alone is real because the co-existence of two absolute realities would be mere absurdity.¹⁸ Basing on such texts, De Smet affirmed that one of Śaṅkara’s cardinal theses is that *Brahman* alone must be held as the one supreme and

13 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Parallel Arguments for the Existence of God in Aquinas and Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 485-89, 485.

14 In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* 2.1.1., *Brahman* is described as: सत्यं ज्ञानम् अनन्तं ब्रह्म॥ (*Brahman* is Reality, Knowledge and Infinity). Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Eight Upanishads*, vol. 1, trans. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 343-59, 303-304.

15 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 1.1.2., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 13-18.

16 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.14., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 326-335.

17 Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 307-311.

18 The original quote reads: “*Ekam eva advitīyam*.” Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, trans. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 468-69, 410-415.

purely transcendent (*atiśaya*) Cause of all other beings.¹⁹ De Smet declares, “Śaṅkara knows of two types of cause: *upādāna* and *nimitta-kāraṇa*. Hence, he proposes two types of arguments: those which prove that *Brahman* is the fundamental *upādāna*, and those which prove that *Brahman* is the supreme *nimitta-kāraṇa* of the whole universe.”²⁰

He also shows their convergence by stating that one and the same *Brahman* is both the causes – the *upādāna* and the *nimitta kāraṇa*. These causes are not opposing to each other, but are complementary. “... *upādāna* transcends materiality or immateriality and can in fact be either material, like clay, or spiritual, like consciousness; it should simply be understood as inner or immanent cause, that from which, in which, and into which the effect arises, endures and returns, and without which it cannot subsist. As to the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, it is always connected with consciousness, whether it means the principal operative cause or the instruments which the latter directs. It is generally extrinsic to the effect but nothing precludes that some *nimitta-kāraṇa* be immanent. Hence, operative causes too form an ascending series.”²¹

Therefore – since infinite regress is excluded from all ascending series – De Smet opines that it is but logical that all *upādāna* and all *nimitta-kāraṇa* series end in a supreme Cause, which is the innermost Consciousness as well as the transcendent and highest Perfection.²² *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (2.1.24) declares that, “the absolutely complete power of *Brahman* does not require to be supplemented by any extraneous help as there is no effect and no instruments known of Him (*Brahman*), no one is seen like unto Him or better.”²³

Causing does not imply any change in *Brahman* and He does not need anything else to be able to cause. Subsequently, since *Brahman* is the total Cause of this world, His causality must be perfect. Whatever perfection of causality is needed in order to explain the ontology of this world must be

19 Cf. Richard De Smet, “A Note About Śaṅkara’s Doctrine of Creation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013), 463-84, 464.

20 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Parallel Arguments for the Existence of God in Aquinas and Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 485-89, 485.

21 Cf. De Smet, “Parallel Arguments for the Existence of God in Aquinas and Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 485.

22 Cf. De Smet, “Parallel Arguments for the Existence of God in Aquinas and Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 485.

23 Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 350-351.

attributed to His causality.²⁴ De Smet's careful wording here is important for – as with Aquinas – it is not the Creator who is related to the creature, but vice versa, and it is precisely the *sui generis* nature of this asymmetrical causal relation which accounts for both the distinction and the non-separateness between them.²⁵ It is because of this that *Brahman* is the *Ātman* of the world, that is, its own most intimate form (*pratyakṣasvarūpam*), its reality itself (*satattvam*), its truth (*yāthātmya*).²⁶ Further, as De Smet put it, “Being (*sattā*) is indeed the one characteristic feature of the world as well as of *Brahman* (*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2, 1, 6), but they are irremediably distinct and different because existence in the creatures cannot receive the attributes of absolute substantiality and infinity as in *Brahman*. Created existence is only an image, a reflection of the absolute existence, and as such a dependent participation, not an existence by right.”²⁷

Hence, to speak of participation would mean neatly outlining the ‘what’ of the mysterious relation between the Absolute and the world, but not yet the ‘how’ because this in De Smet's opinion can only be suggested.²⁸ Śaṅkara's way of suggesting it was through the relation of ‘*tādātmya*.’ De Smet briefly describes it as, “God is the total cause but His causality is not of the same order as the mundane causalities known to us. Even while causing He remains absolutely untouched by His action; the whole reality of the change is in the effect alone. His causality is the perfection of all our causalities, efficient, final, formal, material, but it is above all a transcendent one. All our speculations about its mode of activity are deficient and, after all, not of the utmost importance for us.”²⁹

It must be said that *Tādātmya* is the relation which exists not only between *Brahman* and its effects but also between any internal cause and its effects according to the theory of causality called *sat-kārya-vāda* which

24 Cf. De Smet, “A Note About Śaṅkara's Doctrine of Creation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 464.

25 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Upadhyay's Interpretation of Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 454-62, 456.

26 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* 6.8.7., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 468-469. I have taken this from, Cf. Richard De Smet, “Language and Knowledge of the Absolute According to Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 32-74, 53.

27 Cf. De Smet, “Upadhyay's Interpretation of Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 457 and *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.6., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 312-315.

28 Cf. De Smet, “Upadhyay's Interpretation of Śaṅkara,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 458.

29 Cf. De Smet, “A Note About Śaṅkara's Doctrine of Creation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 484.

maintains that the whole reality of the effects is already ever-present in their internal cause. The effects are characterized by a total ontological dependence on the Cause, without the Cause, they would not be.³⁰ Whereas, *Brahman* is totally independent. The intelligent *Brahman* creates freely, without any need or want and with no help either of external materials or of instruments, but by mere intention and totally out of itself, yet without internal modification or acquisition of any real external relation. It is the one total Source of the universe.³¹ As *upādāna-kāraṇa*, it contains all names and forms (*nāma-rūpas*) virtually, in the manner of future effects and the manifestation of these names and forms (*nāma-rūpas*) involves no modification or diversification in the partless *Ātman*. As *nimitta-kāraṇa*, *Brahman* creates through an intelligent decision needing no pre-existing matter, instruments or demiurge. *Brahman* is considered as being the innermost reality of its effects but not identical with them.³²

3. The Characteristics of *Tādātmya*

Having talked about the non-difference or non-duality of cause and effect in *Brahman*, De Smet goes on to shed some light on the various characteristics of this relation. According to him – in spite of the non-difference of cause and effects – Śaṅkara maintains that we cannot insist on an absolute equality of characteristics. To quote the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (2.1.6), “If absolute equality were insisted on (in the case of one thing being the effect of another), the relation of material cause and effect (which after all requires a distinction of the two) would be annihilated.”³³

Thus, the non-difference of cause and effect does not do away with the superiority of the cause. Some of the characteristics of this *tādātmya* are:

Non-Reciprocity: Non-reciprocity means that the relation of the effect to the *ātman* is not mutual. There cannot be a relationship of mutuality between the cause and effect. De Smet calls this relation as *tad-ātmaka*, because the effect has its *ātman* in the Cause but not the Cause in the effect.³⁴ Thus, “the apparent world has Brahman for its depth – or ontological nature – and

30 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 520.

31 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.25., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 351-353. I have also referred to, Cf. Richard De Smet, “Śaṅkara and Aquinas on Creation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 345-53, 345-347.

32 Cf. De Smet, “Origin: Creation and Emanation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 376-377.

33 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.6., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 313.

34 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 521.

not vice versa.”³⁵ Therefore, this relation is one-sided. There exists only a logical relation from cause to effect, whereas from effect to cause there is a metaphysically real relationship. This creatureship is intrinsic to creatures but creatorship is only extrinsic to creator.³⁶

Total Dependence: Total dependence means that it is most intimate because it is ontological. It implies that the effect has no existence apart from the cause. Quoting from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, De Smet states that “it is an accepted principle even in the world that an effect is intimately dependent (*anuvīdhāyin*) on its Cause (*upādāna*)” and further from the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, “if the cause were to be dissolved, the effect too could no longer exist; but we may assume a continued existence of the cause although the effect is destroyed since this is observed in the case of clay and objects made of clay.”³⁷

Indwelling/Non-Separation: By indwelling it means that since every effect rests within its cause (*upādāna*), all the created beings abide within the *Puruṣa*.³⁸ This according to De Smet is a direct consequence of its total ontological dependence upon the cause.³⁹ As stated in the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, “The non-separation of the two is possible only if the whole aggregate of things originates from the one Brahman; and we understand from the Veda that this assertion can be established only on the [*sat-kārya*] principle, namely, that between the *upādāna* or reality-giving cause and the effect there is non-separation and non-division (*abheda*).”⁴⁰

Non-Otherness: As per De Smet the term non-otherness (*an-anyatva*) denies not every possible distinction but to be ‘other’ the effect or non-otherness

35 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 3.2.21., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 621.

36 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Śaṅkara’s Non-Dualism (Advaitavāda) (1997),” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 305-23, 315.

37 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* 1.5.14., Cf. Swāmī Mādhavānanda, trans., *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad: With the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 157 and *Brahma-or Vedānta-Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.3.14., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 621 and Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 521.

38 Cf. De Smet, “Śaṅkara’s Non-Dualism (Advaitavāda) (1997),” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 315 and *Bhagavad-Gītā Bhāṣya* 8.22., Cf. A. M. Śāstri, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gītā: With the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Mysore: The G. T. A. Printing Works, 1901), 211.

39 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 522.

40 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.3.6., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 450-451.

strictly means that it strictly denies otherness, that is, mutual foreignness, heterogeneity and ontological independence from its cause.⁴¹ If beings are considered as ‘other’ with regard to Brahman, then they would be independent absolutes.⁴² De Smet makes a mention of Marc Sunder Rao (1909-1980) who in his book, “*Ananyatva: Realisation of Christian Non-Dualism*,”⁴³ takes up the notion of non-otherness (*an-anyatva*) and understands it in a dynamic sense as ‘at-one-ness,’ i.e., as the overcoming of alienation into communion. Commenting on this, De Smet writes, “He sees this as the true focus of the Hindu experience of union with God. But this overcoming of otherness is best illustrated in the Trinity and the Incarnation. They are the pattern and cause of the dynamic union of Man with God through Christ. This union is not ontological or moral but ‘pneumatological,’ the work of the Spirit. It is not the mere ‘I-thou’ but the ‘I-in-thee; Thou-in-me’ relationship through which all egocentricity and alienation is overcome by love in a new type of spiritual yoga.”⁴⁴ This in words of Śaṅkara would be that, “the effect is non-other than the Cause, i.e., it has no existence/essence apart from the Cause, it is absent (*kāraṇa-vyatireken* - *ābhāvah*).”⁴⁵

Distinction and Similarity: According to De Smet, though Śaṅkara insists on the non-difference (*an-anyatva*) of Cause and effect, he denies at the same time their absolute identity. The cause is as cause ontologically superior and anterior to the effect as effect. Otherwise, it would be absurd

41 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 522.

42 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Forward Steps in Śaṅkara Research,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 173-190, 183. First published in *Darshana International* 26, no. 3 (1987): 33-46.

43 Cf. M. S. Rao, *Ananyatva: Realisation of Christian Non-Dualism* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1964). Mark Sunder Rao is a Brahmin convert who believes that both Hinduism and Christianity – though taking somewhat different paths – are concerned with the ultimate spiritual vision and realization of the unity of all things. In his work, *Ananyatva: Realisation of Christian Non-Dualism*, he proposes the word ‘perichoresis’ (co-inherence) used by the church fathers which is the ‘basis of the union of the persons in the Trinity and of divinity and humanity in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and spoke of the Holy Spirit as making possible the working of the co-inherence between God and human beings in the created world atoned and renewed in Jesus. According to him, ‘perichoresis’ (co-inherence) is a paradigm for the union of a devotee (*bhakta*) with God, because this is the way in which the three persons unite in one God.

44 I have taken this quote from: Cf. Richard De Smet, “Śaṅkara Vedānta and Christian Theology,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 383-397, 393-394. First published in *Review of Darshana* 1, no. 1 (1980), 33-48.

45 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.14., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 392.

to speak of effect and cause and their relation.⁴⁶ Śaṅkara comments, “If absolute equality [of effect and cause] were insisted on, the relation of inner cause and effect would be annihilated.... In the case of Brahman and the world also, one characteristic feature, namely *sattā*, is found in ether, etc. as well as in Brahman.... [If *an-anything* demanded that the effect possess all the characteristics of Brahman], this assertion would lead to the negation of the relation of cause and effect in general. This relation is based on the fact that there is present in the inner cause an excellence [which is absent in the effect].”⁴⁷ It means that the immanence of the reality giving cause (*upādāna*) into its effects is brought out by saying that the effect exists through the ātman of the cause and that the effects are always superseded by their inner cause and thus inferior to cause. Hence, it is distinct from it and if absolute equality and identity were insisted on, the relation of cause and effect would be annihilated.⁴⁸

Manifestative Extrinsic Denominativeness: De Smet explains this characteristic through the example of an actor. He says that an actor’s dress and make-up may help him manifest himself as a prince, but this would only be an extrinsic denomination. His princehood is not an intrinsic attribute (*viśeṣaṇa*), because it is something that which he has ‘put on’ (*upādhi*) as an external adjunct. An extrinsic denominator can never manifest the intrinsic nature of a being, yet it may manifest this being by reference to objects and roles, those which are extrinsic to it but linked with it in some characteristic way.⁴⁹ As Śaṅkara puts it, “The alleged break in Brahman’s nature (on account of Its Causality) is imagined through *a-vidyā*.”⁵⁰ That is to say, only an ignorant person would take such superimposed denominators for authentic attributes (*viśeṣaṇa*) whereas, the discriminator would know that they are nothing but external adjuncts (*upādhis*).

46 Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 523.

47 I have taken this quote from, Cf. Coelho, *Richard De Smet: Guidelines in Indian Philosophy*, 523. For the text proper see, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.6., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 313.

48 Cf. De Smet, “Śaṅkara’s Non-Dualism (Advaitavāda) (1997),” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 316.

49 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Spiritual Values of Advaita Vedānta and Social Life,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 158-172, 167. First published in *Indian Philosophical Annual* 18 (1985–86), 1-15.

50 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.1.28., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 356-357.

Finitude: In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* we read, “that is infinite (*ananta*) which is not divided from anything but pervades everything.”⁵¹ This means that since every creature is limited by others, they are small (*alpa*) and may never be called Being (Sat) in the maximal sense.⁵² De Smet advises that as long as one discerns all the above-mentioned properties of the *tādātmya* properly, the relation between Brahman and the world remains clear.⁵³ That is to say: the relation between Brahman and the world is not a reciprocal relation – as pure identity between Brahman and the universe might be – but rather one of total ontological non-reciprocal dependence upon Brahman.⁵⁴

Tādātmya signifies that constant ontological dependence which implies the pervading causal presence of Brahman in all other beings. These exist by the power of its free command and they neither add or subtract anything from the fullness of their Cause. This Cause – writes De Smet – is not an intermediary Īśvara but the one Brahman-Ātman, the supreme Existent, that remains *nirguṇa* and *nirapekṣa* even though it’s creating makes it appear to our ignorant minds as *saguṇa* and *sāpekṣa*.⁵⁵

Tādātmya is that kind of a close-knit unity which links the experiencer (*bhoktr*) with his supreme *Ātman*. There are two possibilities of viewing this unity. The experiencer (*bhoktr*) can view it as merely existing in him as an unrecognized causality or it can become fully recognized by him. For De Smet, between these two extremes lies the domain of one’s spiritual love for God animated by the dynamism of one’s intellectual thirst for God (*Brahma-jijñāsa*).⁵⁶ In the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (1.1.1) Śaṅkara writes that the intellectual thirst or desire for knowledge of the supreme “culminates in comprehension (*avagati-paryantam jñānam*), since the comprehension of *Brahman* is indeed the end of man (*Brahmavagtirhipurusarthah*).”⁵⁷ How could anything finite know adequately about Fullness?

51 For the quote proper see, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* 2.1.1., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Eight Upanishads*, vol. 1, trans. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 310.

52 Cf. De Smet, “Śaṅkara’s Non-Dualism (Advaitavāda) (1997),” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 316.

53 Cf. De Smet, “Origin: Creation and Emanation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 381-382.

54 Cf. Richard De Smet, “Advaitavāda and Christianity,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 354-358, 356.

55 Cf. De Smet, “Śaṅkara and Aquinas on Creation,” in *Understanding Śaṅkara*, 352.

56 Cf. De Smet, “Love versus Identity,” *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 525.

57 *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 1.1.1., Cf. Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*, 6-13.

De Smet finds a suitable solution to it in Aquinas and – to a certain extent – a resemblance of it in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5.⁵⁸ According to Aquinas, for a human being to enter into the perfect intellectual possession of God, there must be a free self-gift of the very essence of God, by which God illumines man's intellect. In this experience God is not only the Reality known but also the immediate Informer of the intellect. Thus, besides the ontological presence of God as creator in His creatures, God lovingly surrenders to those purified created spirits whose knowledge of God has aligned with His divine love. When the supreme *Ātman*, who is the supreme object of all love and pure consciousness communicates Himself in the pure union of blissful love, then man's intellect really shares in the very divine consciousness and omniscience. According to De Smet, this oneness in consciousness implies the supreme oneness in love and bliss, the identity begun by love and achieved by love.⁵⁹

God's love for us does not change or perfect God but only us. It is this change in us which is the foundation of the relation that arises from it. This foundation being extrinsic to God, the relation of God to us as our Lover is only logical. Whereas, our relation to Him as the terms of his love, is a perfecting actuation of our potentiality and thus an ontological complement of our being.⁶⁰ For De Smet this dependence is eminently personal in nature and the object of intellectual contemplation and love. Love, therefore, a love of God communicated to human beings by God Himself, is the supreme integration of human beings with the Personal Absolute. This is a revelation of an I-Thou relationship between the Personal Absolute and human beings. It discloses in both – the Personal Absolute and human beings – a dimension of personal intimacy and of elective communicability.⁶¹

To conceive of God as love and to be able to receive into itself the current of devotion (*bhakti*) was one of the greatest achievements of

58 See part one, question number twelve of the *Summa Theologiae* and Cf. Swāmī Mādhavānanda, trans., *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad: With the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 245-248.

59 Cf. De Smet, "Love versus Identity," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 525-526.

60 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Is the Concept of 'Person' Congenial to Śāṅkara Vedānta?," in *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2010), 110-17, 111-112. First published under the title, "Is the Concept of 'Person' Congenial to Śāṅkara Vedānta?," in *Indian Philosophical Annual* 8 (1972) 199-205. Reprinted under the same title in, *Reflection* (Rajpur, Dehradun) 2 (1973) 3-9, and under the title, "Is the Concept of Person Suitable in Vedānta?," in *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies* 12/3 (1973), 155-162. I have followed the 2010 version.

61 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Early Trends in the Indian Understanding of Man," in *Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2010), 105-107.

Vedānta.⁶² It opened the Hindu non-dualistic thought to the possibility that the highest *Brahman* was more than a vast ocean of pure consciousness, that it was also capable of love, causation and grace, but in such a way that the simplicity, plenitude and transcendence of the divine were in no way compromised. The Smet concludes that no conditions or properties can prevent the absolute Deity from initiating interpersonal relationships or from being a 'person,' but are words, concepts or terms of our everyday language capable of apprehending the Personal Absolute? Just like the Christian tradition that recognises certain terms as particularly appropriate to indicate the Absolute by analogy, De Smet's own contribution to the *Advaitin*-Christian dialogue is his study of *lakṣaṇā* – a Śāṅkarian tool of interpretation – that elevates words, concepts and terms in order to point authentically to the positive Fullness of the Absolute.⁶³

Conclusion

This article has argued that the concept of *tādātmya*, as retrieved and interpreted by Richard De Smet, provides a compelling key to understanding Śāṅkara's theory of causality and the metaphysical relation between *Brahman* and the world. Far from implying a strict identity or monistic fusion, *tādātmya* expresses a unique ontological dependence in which the world exists *in*, *by*, and *through Brahman*, yet without reciprocally affecting or conditioning the Absolute. This relation is marked by non-otherness, indwelling presence, asymmetry, and manifestative dependence, which together preserve the plenitude and immutability of *Brahman* while affirming the derivative reality of the world.

In aligning Śāṅkara's concept of causality with Aquinas' theology of creation, De Smet not only facilitates a fruitful philosophical comparison but also opens new avenues for cross-cultural theological inquiry. His insistence that non-reciprocal participation – rather than ontological dualism or collapse into identity – best captures the Śāṅkarian relation of *Brahman* to creation, resonates with both *Advaitic* and Christian metaphysical sensibilities. Ultimately, as this article has shown, the doctrine of *tādātmya*, when properly understood, invites a profound vision of the Absolute as both utterly transcendent and intimately present a vision that sustains a contemplative theology rooted in knowledge, dependence, and love.

62 Cf. Richard De Smet, "Śāṅkara Vedānta and Christian Theology," in *Understanding Śāṅkara: Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2013), 383-397, 393. First published in *Review of Darshana* 1, no. 1 (1980): 33-48.

63 Cf. De Smet, "Śāṅkara Vedānta and Christian Theology," in *Understanding Śāṅkara*, 394-395.

Tādātmya and Prasāda
Sara Grant and Bradley J. Malkovsky
On the Metaphysics and Soteriology of Śaṅkara

Sunil Jose, SDB

Introduction

Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita Vedānta has traditionally been understood as a radical non-dualism that affirms the absolute identity of Brahman and the self (*Ātman*), while regarding the phenomenal world as ultimately unreal. Within this framework, the question of how to conceive the relation between Brahman and the empirical world has occasioned ongoing debate. Sara Grant's seminal work, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation*, offers a groundbreaking lexicological exploration of Śaṅkara's texts, unveiling a pluralistic use of relational terms such as *sambandha*, *samvāya*, and *tādātmya*. Grant demonstrates that Śaṅkara's doctrine does not reject relation outright but rather locates it within a complex ontological status—*sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa*—where the empirical world is neither absolutely real nor utterly unreal. Her interpretative stance affirms the legitimacy of discussing relationality from the standpoint of the detached inquirer, reconciling Advaita's metaphysics with experiential and pedagogical realities.

In parallel, Bradley J. Malkovsky's scholarship deepens this discourse by emphasizing the often-overlooked dimension of divine grace (*prasāda*) in Śaṅkara's soteriology. Contrary to assumptions that Advaita's ultimate realization is achieved solely by human effort and knowledge,

Malkovsky argues that Śaṅkara envisages grace as an indispensable, albeit paradoxical, co-agent in the liberation process. This theological nuance complements Grant's metaphysical insights, presenting Śaṅkara's thought as a sophisticated interplay of identity and dependence, human striving and divine benevolence. Together, Grant and Malkovsky reinvigorate the study of Śaṅkara's doctrines by bridging Indian philosophical exegesis and theological reflection, inviting a more textured appreciation of Advaita Vedānta's conceptual richness.

I

Sara Grant on Concept of Relation

Sara Grant¹ in her thesis, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation*, deals with the *tādātmya* - the relationship between *Brahman* and *Ātman* in Śaṅkara, the *tat tvam asi*. Her findings supported those of De Smet, and the University of Bombay accepted her thesis.² She starts by saying that firstly, we need to answer the question whether it is legitimate to speak of 'relation' in Śaṅkara's philosophy. When an eminent scholar like Radhakrishnan poses such a question, then it is all the more necessary to provide an answer. It is interesting to note that Radhakrishnan in his presentation of Indian Philosophy says that for Śaṅkara the problem of the relation between *Brahman* and the unreal world is not legitimate. Hence, it is impossible to present a solution to the issue of relation. It is true, as Radhakrishnan says, that for a person who has attained *Ātmanubhava*, the nature of the world does not arise. He sees the world in the light of true knowledge he or she possesses. There is also a second standpoint. The relation between *Brahman* and the world is out of question for a person who is engrossed in the multiplicity of the phenomenal world. He or she is so entangled in the names-and-forms (*nāma-rūpa*) and thinks that they are absolutely real. The awareness of *Brahman* is yet to dawn upon him. Still, there is a possibility to conceive a third standpoint. This is the crucial position of the 'inquirer into *Brahman*.' It is the position of the guru who guides the disciple in the inquiry into *Brahman*. It is the standpoint of the metaphysician, the detached observer who after coming to realize the absolute experience of *Brahman* and the empirical experience of names and forms, tries to trace the hidden relation between them. This is the position from which Śaṅkara wrote

1 Sara Grant (1922–2002) was a distinguished British Indologist, Catholic religious sister, and Christian missionary whose contributions were seminal to twentieth-century interreligious dialogue, particularly between Christianity and Hinduism. Among her most influential works are *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (1991) and *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation* (1999).

2 Ivo Coelho, "Fr. Richard De Smet (1916-97): Reminiscences," 5.

the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. Therefore, from the standpoint of the detached metaphysician, the question of the relation between *Brahman* and the world derives its legitimacy.³

In the *Br. S. Bh.* II. ii. 38, while answering the opponent's question regarding the relation between the Lord (cause) and the world (effect) Śaṅkara replies: "There is, we reply, no difficulty in our case, as the relation we assume is of identity" (Grant, 1999: 87). Relation implies relation between two terms, in this case, *Brahman* and the world. The idea of relation becomes meaningless the moment one of the terms is dropped or proved unreal. Thus, from the angle of Dr. Radhakrishnan, to speak of a relation between real *Brahman* and the unreal world is absurd. But is the world unreal? The world is not unreal or pure illusion in the supreme sense of the term (*A-sat*), like the horn of the hare or the son of a barren woman. It is also not in the absolute sense Real (*Sat*) in, which *Brahman* alone is real. The world is *Sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa*, which cannot be characterized as Real or Unreal, supremely understood. The world is relatively real. Considering the world as totally unreal and therefore the relation between the *Brahman* and the world as illegitimate is a mistake.

1. Relational Terms Used by Sara Grant

Sara Grant in her book, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation*, makes an exhaustive study of the relational terms used by Śaṅkara. This gives us a clear picture of Śaṅkara's conception of the nature of relation itself. The terms *Sambandha*, *Samyoga*, *Samavāya*, *Svarūpa*, and *Tādātmya* are analyzed from the three main texts, the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, the *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* and the *Upadeśasāhasrī*.

Sambandha: The term *sambandha* when rendered in English will simply mean 'relation.' This general meaning of *sambandha* embraces all the specific meanings offered by *samyoga*, *samavāya*, *svarūpa* and *tādātmya*. This accounts for the maximum occurrence of the term in all the three combined (295 times). Since, nowhere in the writings of Śaṅkara do we find a definition for *sambandha*, Sara Grant concludes that this generic term was widely used by Śaṅkara to mean relation in all senses, be it physical contact, causal and logical. (Grant, 1999: 91-97). Consequently, *sambandha* is unfit to be the basis in order to draw conclusions regarding the issue of relation. The term not only has a wide application but it also carries a certain vagueness in its meaning. Therefore, *sambandha* should be rejected even though the term appears in the passage about *Brahman*, because it does not accurately portray a specific relation. (Grant, 1999: 91-97).

3 Sara Grant, *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt., Ltd., 1999), 87.

Samyoga: In the *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya*, we find, the traditional definition of *samyoga*. It means the relation of contact of parts, as between a rope and a vessel. This unity is the fact of one thing being in contact with one another, say the pot placed on the table. This can be called as situational unity or relation, which can be disrupted easily without doing harm to either of the related terms. However, its usage in texts show that Śāṅkara gives a more general connotation of the term than its prescribed meaning. Thus, we see that *samyoga* is used of the union of man and woman, the contact of senses with the objects and the contact with pain etc. Sara Grant points out that Śāṅkara accepts *samyoga* relation within the sphere of *vyavaharika* or phenomenal experience only. But here we are concerned with a relation in which one of its terms, the *Brahman* is beyond this phenomenal world. Therefore, application of *samyoga* to the relation between the *Brahman* and the world is an error.

Samavāya: In this relation one of the terms is dependent on the other, like ‘blueness’ which as an attribute cannot reside by itself but for example, in a flower, which is a substance. Thus, one of its terms (blueness) cannot remain by itself apart from its relation to the other term (flower). Hence, *samavāya* is more binding relation than *samyoga* in which the related terms are independent of each other. In the *Bh. G. Bh.* we see what Śāṅkara means by this term. *Samavāya* is a relation of inseparable inherence, like that between the threads and the cloth. (*Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* XIII. 26).

2. Svarūpa - Real Nature / Essential Nature

The term *svārūpa* can be translated as ‘real nature’ or ‘essential nature.’ Sara Grant here takes the cue from George Thibaut’s translation of the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* for the *Sacred Books of the East* series. Monier William’s Sanskrit-English Dictionary presents *svārūpa* as ‘own form or shape.’ (Grant, 1999: 104). Śāṅkara has something more to offer in his writings. As this term is extremely important for a clear understanding of Śāṅkara’s concept of relation, separate and exhaustive treatment of the main texts is necessary. In the *Bh. G. Bh.*, *svārūpa* occurs mostly in the passages referring either to the Supreme Self or the Lord or to the true nature of the enlightened individual, *vidvān*.

In the passages referring to the Supreme Self, the relational aspect of *svārūpa* is clearly seen. The Lord says to Arjuna: Never did I cease to exist; ...so also never did you cease to exist; as the Self, the *Ātman*, we are eternal in all the three periods of time. How exactly is the Supreme Self, related to the beings? The Supreme Self is seen as something actively residing inside the being. In other words, the Supreme Self or the *ParamĀtman* is the *svārūpa* (real nature) of the individual beings. Sara Grant substantiates

her claims with the facts: that is, one part of myself constitutes the nature (*svārūpa*) of all beings. The Supreme Self is actively residing in all the beings. The Self is the supporter as well as the enjoyer because of its eternal intelligence, which guides the *manas* and the *buddhi* of the man. (*B. G. Bh. XIII.2*). The Self is called the supporter (*svārūpa-dharanam*) because the body, the senses, *manas* and the *buddhi* are what they are only as made by that intelligent Self. (*B. G. Bh. XIII. 2*).

The Self is the enjoyer because by the Self who is *nitya-caitanya-svārūpa* (that is, whose inherent nature is eternal intelligence) are clearly perceived in their mutual relations, all states of mind constituted of pleasure, pain and delusion which as they come into being are permeated as it were by the intelligent Self. (Grant, 1999: 106-107). The *Ātman* of the individual has true nature of the *ParamĀtman*. This is indicated by the term *atmasvārūpa*, which is true nature of the enlightened man (*vidvān*) and also of the *ParamĀtman*. Who is this *vidvān*? The introduction to the fifth discourse gives the answer. “...[T]he enlightened man is the one who knows the Self, who knows himself to the Self that is devoid of all changes, of birth, etc., and is actionless, and whose illusory knowledge has been replaced by right knowledge...” (Grant, 1999: 108).

Thus, *svārūpa* in the *Bh. G. Bh.* serves to indicate a unique relation between God and man. The real nature of the human being is *Brahman* or the Supreme Self. It is due to our ignorance that we do not perceive this truth. Once *avidyā* is substituted with true knowledge about *Brahman*, then the human being, who is enlightened now would perceive the truth that he or she has the Self as his or her individual Self. This is the highest bliss by way of knowledge proposed by Śāṅkara. In the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, *svārūpa* occurs in those passages, which either directly or by implication refers to *Brahman* and the context is one of relation between the Self and the individual. The *svārūpa* relation is expressed in such a way that the enlightened individual speaks of himself as the Self or addressed so: “The connection of enjoyment, etc., with me, O my mind, who am ‘by nature’ consciousness itself is due to the delusion created by you” (*Upad. II. viii.1*).

While the liberation is understood as the realization of the *svārūpa* relation between the individual self and the Supreme Self, it opens up avenues for grave misunderstandings too. It happens when the human intellect (*buddhi*) begins to think that it itself is conscious and worse still, no other being is so. “Consciousness, which of the ‘nature’ (*svārūpa*) of the eternal Self is superimposed on the intellect. This indiscrimination and nothing else is called *samsara*.” (*Upad. II. xvi. 61*). Thus *svārūpa* gives us a clue that though the individual self is identical to the Supreme Self yet there is an apparent difference or non-identity or the otherness existing between the *upadhis* and the Supreme Self.

In the *Bh. G. Bh.*, the term *svarūpa* appears once in every three and half pages and so the importance accorded to it can be judged from this fact. The *svarūpa* texts can be grouped into three classes: the texts that refer to the nature of the objects of experience at the phenomenal level; the texts that speak of the essential nature of the Supreme Self and the texts that speak of Supreme Self as the essential nature of the individual self or the *jīva*. (Grant, 1999: 113-114).

In *B. S. Bh. I. Iii. 20*, it is said that the individual soul or *jīva* is intrinsically united with the body and its organs during the waking state. It is the ruler of the body. It permeates the body during sleep and experiences dream visions. In dreamless deep sleep, however, the *jīva* rises beyond its connection with the gross and subtle body and reaches the Supreme Self; that is, it appears in its 'own nature' (*svarūpa*). However, an important point to be borne in mind is that the reference to the individual soul is not meant to determine the nature of the individual soul but rather the nature of the highest Lord (*B. S. Bh. I. Iii. 20*). In that sense is not the soul always having the real nature (*svarūpa*) of *Brahman*? Then, what does it mean to say only in deep sleep it attains its nature? Śaṅkara clarifies as saying that it cannot, however, be said that the soul is at any time not united with *Brahman*; for its 'true nature' can never pass away. But considering it in waking and dreaming as passing, owing to contact with its *upadhis*, into something else, as it were, it may be said that when those adjuncts are removed, it passes back into its 'true nature.' It would be entirely wrong to say that in sleep it sometimes becomes united with *Brahman* and sometimes not. If we say that in deep sleep it abides in *Brahman*, we do not mean thereby that there is a difference between the abode and that, which abides, but that there is absolute identity between the two. (*B. S. Bh. III. Ii. 7*).

This passage vaguely indicates the 'otherness' of the individual soul from the Supreme Self. As long as the *jīva* is in contact with the *upadhis* it does not realize its true nature. This raises the problem of apparent 'otherness' of the individual soul, which is in conflict to *svarūpa* relation, which is supposed to enjoy with the Supreme Self. Again, the same thought is stressed in *B. S. Bh. Iii. 19*: ...[T]hat same highest *Brahman* constitutes, as we know from sayings such as 'that thou art thou', the 'real nature' of the individual soul, while its second nature, that is, that aspect of it which depends on limiting conditions, is not its 'real nature.'" The same passage further says that this dual nature of the individual soul, which is projected by nescience, when removed through discriminative knowledge, realized its 'real nature.' Śaṅkara compares this delusion of the knower to the man who mistakes a post for a man in the evening light. When the post is perceived in the proper light there is not chance for error. (Grant, 1999: 119). In the same *svarūpa* text, Śaṅkara uses the analogy of the transparent crystal and snake

rope illusion to stress the importance of the discriminative knowledge. The transparency and whiteness is the characteristic nature of the crystal, as the Supreme Self is the real nature of the *jīva*. It did not lose its nature when placed against a coloured background but it is the observer's lack of right knowledge that made it appear so. So also, when the discriminative knowledge is risen then the understanding that 'the real nature of the *jīva* is the Supreme Self is realized (Grant, 1999: 120).

The individual soul is, therefore called 'that whose "true nature" is non-manifest' merely on account of the absence of such discriminative knowledge and it is called 'that whose nature' has become manifest on account of the presence of such knowledge. Thus, the difference between the individual soul and the highest Lord is owing to wrong knowledge only, not to any reality, since like ether, the highest Lord is not in real contact with anything that is, the only possible relation is one of identity. (*B. S. Bh. I. Iii. 19*).

If absolute identity is predicated of *jīva* and the Supreme Self then, there is no individual soul. As long as the soul relates itself to *buddhi* and the *upadhis* due to lack of perfect knowledge, so long the duality of the individual soul and the Supreme Self exists. This concept of individual soul is fictitiously created by the intellect, which is not informed by the right knowledge. (*B. S. Bh. I. Iii. 30*). This *svarūpa* text has been a potential source of misinterpretation. At the face value, we can brand Śaṅkara as a monist for whom the *Brahman* alone exists. But we need to realize that the passage has to be seen from the *paramarthika* or transcendental view. Therefore, from the transcendental view, *Brahman* alone exists, as there is nothing but absolute identity between the Supreme Self and individual self. But from the *vyavaharika* view or the phenomenal level, a unique relation can be predicated between the *Brahman* and the *jīva*.

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that Śaṅkara gives great importance to the term *svarūpa* when he speaks of relation, than the terms *samyoga* and *samavāya*. It is clear from the *svarūpa* passages that when the individual soul is cleared of its individuating attributes then a relation of *svarūpa* is predicated of the Supreme *Brahman* and the individual soul. But we are yet to clarify the relation of *upadhis* as *upadhis* and *Ātman-Brahman*. Because, *svarūpa* relation between the Supreme *Brahman* and the *jīva* gives way to the idea that *Brahman* alone is real and everything else is an illusion. But on the contrary, Śaṅkara did not regard the world and the *jīva* as an illusion to be dispelled at the dawn of discriminative knowledge. Hence, understanding relation between the individual soul and the Supreme Self is

important, which would make us realize that the identity, which is envisaged in this context, respects the demands of the multiplicity of the phenomenal world and the One. *Brahman*. (Grant, 1999: 128). The Supreme Self is the cause of the universe and all that is contained in it, including the *jīva*. This relation of causality entails certain superiority on the part of the cause (*B. S. Bh.* I. ii. 44). In other words, there is not only identity but also a distinction between the world and the *jīva* on the one, and Supreme *Brahman* on the other. This is not a logical distinction but a difference in metaphysical status. Therefore, the relation between the Supreme Self and the world is not a simple identity. In fact, the term ‘identity’ is not the proper expression of this relation in which one term that is, the *Brahman* completely transcends the limits of our phenomenal experience. (Grant, 1999: 129). Therefore, expressing Śaṅkara’s conception of relation by the normal connotation of such words as ‘identity’ is doing injustice to his thought. Therefore, an extensive verification of the term *tādātmya* as used by Śaṅkara is vital to understanding the intricacies of the relationship between the individual self and the Supreme Self.

3. *Tādātmya*

Tādātmya is often translated as ‘identity.’ But etymologically it means ‘having That’ (*tat*) as one’s *Ātman*.⁴

3.1. The Classical Understanding of *Tādātmya*

Traditionally, identity is used without restraint to mean the ‘absolute identity’ of the two terms — ‘That’, which refers to the Supreme *Brahman* and ‘*Ātman*’, which refers to the individual self. Hence, it is obvious that influenced by such an understanding, identity statements can easily be interpreted as teaching monistic pantheism. This line of erroneous interpretation has been adopted in some currents of later systematic Vedānta.⁵ Such a monistic understanding of Advaita is clearly seen in the teaching of Swami Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan. The idea of the Advaitists is to generate the whole universe into one — that something, which is really whole of this universe.⁶ Again, it is not, the Vedantists say, that there is something as phenomenon and something as noumenal. The rope is changed into snake apparently only; and when the delusion ceases, the snakes vanish. When one is in ignorance, he or she sees the phenomenon and does not see God. When

4 Richard V. De Smet, “Guidelines in Indian Philosophy,” (Class Notes, Jnana Deep Vidyapeeth, Pune, 1968), 291.

5 Richard V. De Smet, “Ancient Religious Speculation in India,” *The Divine Life* (1964): 4.

6 Swami Ananyanada, “The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,” 9th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), 1: 363.

he or she sees God, universe vanishes entirely for him or her. Ignorance or *māyā*, as it is called, is the cause of this entire phenomenon - the Absolute, unchangeable, being taken as this manifested universe (Ananyanada, 1964: 363). Vivekananda says that the Advaitists have no place for the individual soul. They say individual souls are created by *māyā*. In reality they cannot exist. If there were only one existence throughout, how could it be that I am one, and you are one, and so forth? We are all one, and the cause of the evil is perception of duality (Ananyanada, 1964: 363).

By denying the individual existence of human soul Vivekananda nullifies cause and effect relationship. It is the result of understanding *Brahman*-self relationship as an absolute identity. Imbued with such an understanding we find Vivekananda interpreting the *Tatvamasi* (That thou art) in a pure monistic fashion (Ananyanada, 1964: 397-417). Vivekananda no more respects the demands of cause-and-effect relationship. “...you see the effect and the effect alone, and the cause you cannot see, and the moment you can see the cause, the effect will have vanished. Where is the world then, and who has taken it off?” (Ananyanada, 1964: 421).

Is it not our common experience that a mud pot cannot be made without the clay? The classical understanding, by propagating absolute identity of the cause and the effect that is, the Supreme *Brahman* and the individual beings, would seem to claim to our great embarrassment that a pot and clay are same. But both are not the same. The clay constitutes the pot. Without the former the latter cannot exist. The effect can be demolished but the cause continues to exist (*B. S. Bh.* 2. 3. 14). The pot can be broken but its cause, the clay, continues to exist. Then, how can we justify the claim of an absolute identity between cause and effect? But if we insist on absolute identity then the relation of cause and effect is meaningless. The effect is same or identical as the cause, which implies the individual beings are identical to the Supreme *Ātman* that is, individual beings are *Brahman*. But Śaṅkara teaches that, only *sat* (existence) is found in the beings and not all the characteristics of *Brahman*. In fact, there is a presence of an excellence in the Cause, which is not seen in the effect (*B. S. Bh.* 2. 3. 6).

3.2. De Smet’s Understanding of *Tādātmya*

The term *Ātman*, which is originally the reflexive pronoun, seem to signify the subject himself. But the subject can be analyzed into a series of inner selves as spoken of in *Katha Upanisad* 1. 3. 10-11, in the hierarchical order of *indriyas*, *arthas*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *atma mahanavyakta* and *purusa*. Śaṅkara interprets this hierarchy as a ladder of more interior *Ātmans*, each one being subtle than the one, which precedes it. *Purusa* is the innermost and the uppermost *Ātman*, which is the climax of this ladder of *Ātmans*. With regard to *purusa*, all other lower *Ātmans* are only *upadhis* and can be

negated. But through the gradual rise of their excellence and ontological gradation as beings the lower Ātmans, serve to reveal the supreme Ātman, who alone is Real (*B. S. Bh.* 1. 1. 11). Therefore, at the highest level, Ātman does not mean the subject but the highest Ātman who is 'Within' the subject, the Innermost in every being, which 'Is' pure consciousness (De Smet, 1968: 292). It is also the inner or substantial cause (*upadana-karana*) of all effected beings. It is also the intelligent *nimitta-karana*. It is the *svārūpa* of all beings. It is the Ātman of all (*SarvĀtman*). Thus, such Upanishadic metaphors as "the *purusa* within the cave of the heart" etc., are fully justified by this explanation. (De Smet, 1968: 292). This understanding of *tādātmya* respects the cause-and-effect relation, and affirms the presence of an excellence in the Cause, which is absent in the effect. The effect is not absolutely identical to the cause. "It is an accepted principle, even in the world, that an effect is immediately, is intimately dependent (*anuvīdhayin*) on its (substantial) cause" (*B. S. Bh.* 2. 3. 14). This dependence imparts no reality to the cause but only to its effects for "as long as an effect subsists, it is impossible to assume the dissolution of its (substantial) cause, since on the dissolution of the latter, the effect also cannot subsist. On the other hand, we may assume that continued existence of the cause although the effect is destroyed; for that is actually observed in the case of clay." Names-and-forms in all their states have *Brahman* alone as their Ātman, but *Brahman* has not its Ātman in them (*Tai. U. Bh.* 2. 6.1). This means that *tādātmya* is a non-mutual relationship. The individual beings simply do not exist without their substantive Cause *Brahman*. They have their Ātman in *Brahman* (*tad-atmaka*). (*Tai. U. Bh.* 2. 6.1). The effect in reality is non-different (*ananya*) from the Cause that is the effect has no existence apart from the Cause. Therefore, this theory of *tādātmya* "does away the independent existence of the embodied Ātman... and the world" (*B. S. Bh.* 2. 1. 14).

Therefore, *tādātmya* signifies that constant ontological dependence which implies the pervading causal presence of *Brahman* in all other beings. The beings exist by the power of *Brahman*. He is the cause of all beings. The beings neither add nor subtract anything from the fullness of their Cause. It is a non-reciprocal relation, in which the effect does not match with the excellence of its Cause though it is non-different from it (Cause). The Cause is the one *Brahman-Ātman*, the Supreme Existent.

4. *Tādātmya* and the *Upadhis*

The existential relationship between the *upadhis* and *Ātman-Brahman* has been exposed here. First is the question of relation of *upadhis* to each other: does Śāṅkara posit a *tādātmya* relation between the effected beings? The answer is positive, speaking from the idea that for Śāṅkara the relationship between a cause and an effect, a substance and its qualities is one of

tādātmya. For example, gold as an inner cause provides its own reality to the ornament. The relation is so identical that without their inner cause the effect cannot exist (Grant, 1999: 146).

But a closer look at Śāṅkara's denial of *tādātmya* relation of *Mukhyaprana* to the senses presents a problem. *Mukhyaprana* is different from the body as the energizing principle of the body and its organs. It is not reached by death. Its residing and departing marks either the existence or the death of the body. Therefore, to a great extent the body and the senses are dependent on the *mukhyaprana* and not identical with it. Only in so far as that it is the energizing principle, that the *prana* is called as the *atma* of the body (Grant, 1999: 146-147). Here we find that a relation of *tādātmya* does not exist between two *upadhis*, namely, *mukhyaprana* and the senses.

The teaching of Advaita is that there is only One Self. It is only the ignorant who think that it is embodied in the body, the senses and the mind. But they are only the limiting adjuncts of the Supreme Self. This is in tune with the doctrine of "five sheaths", which appears at *B.S. Bh.* I.1. 14ff. The five sheaths are the *annamāyākośa* (food sheath), *pranamāyākośa* (vital breath-sheath), *manomāyākośa* (mind-sheath), *vijñānamāyākośa* (intelligence-sheath), and *ānandamāyākośa* (self of bliss). This text is to reveal to our rationality that *Brahman* is the indwelling Ātman or Self. Like the rice, which is extracted from the grain called *kodrava*, which has many husks, the five sheaths are eliminated to show that the 'Self' is the inmost dweller, which supports the five sheaths. The Self does not belong to the series as a member. Absolutely speaking the five sheaths are not 'selves' but only a resemblance of the Supreme Self. The progressive interiority of the sheaths gradually reveals the Supreme Self can be compared to the progressive manifestation of the Self in the varieties of beings (Grant, 1999: 148-149).

Although one and the same Self is hidden in all beings, movable as well as immovable, yet owing to the gradual rise of excellence of the minds which form the limiting adjuncts (of the Self) scripture declares that the Self, although eternal, unchanging and uniform, reveals itself in a graduated series of beings and so appears in forms of dignity and power (*Br. S. Bh.* I. i. 11). The above-cited quotation clarifies Śāṅkara's acceptance of the ontological reality of the phenomenal world. It is clear from the foregoing analysis that the *upadhis* do not have a *tādātmya* relation to each other. This means that a cow, a man, a post, a stone, etc., are not the same. They are different from each other but have their common dependence on *Ātman-Brahman*. The Supreme Self, who is hidden in the various beings, be it inanimate or animate, is One. "For gold ornaments and figures of gold are not identical with each other, but only in so far as gold constitutes the Self of both" (*Br. S. Bh.* IV. i. 4). The *upadhis* are not identical to each

other, but only so far as *Ātman-Brahman* constitutes their self. Therefore, instances such as an individual entity be described as the cause of another due to energizing influence of the one on the other, relation on the inner cause to the effect; the relation of the substance to its qualities, which are described by Śaṅkara as *tādātmya* relationship are actually analogies at the phenomenal level in order to express the real relation of *tādātmya* between the *upadhis* and *Brahman* (Grant, 1999: 151). Therefore, in the strict sense, there is no *tādātmya* relation between each other.

5. Relation of *Upadhis* to *Ātman-Brahman*

The relation of the *Ātman* to *jīva* as *jīva* and of *Brahman* to the world is not a relation of identity in the general sense. It is a radical unity of being, which demands a certain difference. If there is no awareness of difference between *Ātman-Brahman* and the *Upadhis*, then the predication of identity is not possible. “Thus, the predication of the absolute unity of *Ātman-Brahman* could not be made in the total absence of *upadhis* -- it is only in terms of an at least apparent duality that the affirmation of ultimate non-duality can take place” (Grant, 1999: 151).

Every *upadhi* in its inmost essence has the *svarūpa* of *Ātman-Brahman* on which they wholly depend as the inner principle of their being. But for this total dependence, any *upadhi* would fall headlong into non-being. A being becomes non-being without its inner principle, the *Ātman-Brahman*. This is not just a question of epistemological awareness on the part of the enlightened man about the relative non-existence of being but an ontological annihilation. (Grant, 1999: 151). In other words, any being without *Ātman-Brahman* ceases to exist in reality. The universe and all that is in it, has a relative existence, an existence that is totally dependent on *Ātman-Brahman*. In this *tādātmya* relation, non-difference or separability is predicated of the *upadhis* in relation to *Ātman-Brahman* in relation to *upadhis*.

The entire aggregate of things is not different from the Self. (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I. iv. 19). As the world springs from *Brahman*, it cannot be separate from *Brahman*. The effect has no existence apart from the cause so this manifold world has no existence apart from *Brahman*. (*Br. S. Bh.* II. i. 14). But this difference or separability is predicated ‘only’ of *Ātman-Brahman* in relation to the *upadhis*. For in the same way as scripture speaks of the origin of the world from *Brahman* it also speaks of *Brahman* as subsisting apart from its effects. (*Br. S. Bh.* II. i. 27.) The assertion that the Self is not separate from the body cannot be maintained. The Self rather must be something separate from the body, because the existence of the Self does not depend on the existence of that (*Br. S. Bh.* III. iii. 54).

When Śaṅkara negates the world as non-existent, it only refers in the epistemological plane and not in the metaphysical or ontological order. The

non-dependence of the *Ātman-Brahman* on ‘names-and-forms’ is stressed to show his transcendence of the phenomenal universe. The Supreme Being is attributed as Lord, ruler etc., by us, the finite beings. These attributes neither add to nor subtract anything from the real nature of the *Ātman-Brahman*. Thus, this non-reciprocal relation affects the beings and not the *Ātman-Brahman*, because the former is ontologically dependent on the latter and not vice-versa (Grant, 1999: 156).

In conclusion Sara Grant says that the phenomenal universe is essentially relational in character. The Self, which is One, cannot enter into a relation, for relation involves two terms. On the other hand, for the phenomenal world, the aspect of relation, more precisely the non-reciprocal relation of dependence is admitted without which it becomes a non-being. *Ātman-Brahman* is immanent in all beings as their source or ground. There is no real or internal relation on the part of *Ātman-Brahman*. The presence or absence of the phenomenal universe would affect the *Ātman-Brahman* in no way. Thus, Śaṅkara is determined to safeguard the absolute transcendence of *Ātman-Brahman*. But there is a real internal relation of dependence on the part of the world. Sara Grant figuratively explains this through an equation:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Ātman-Brahman} - \text{jīva/jagat} &= \text{Ātman-Brahman} \\ \text{Jīva/jagat} - \text{Ātman-Brahman} &= 0. \text{ (Grant, 1999: 156).}\end{aligned}$$

The sum and substance of Śaṅkara’s concept of relation is *tādātmya*, the correct understanding of which frees Śaṅkara, of the oft quoted title, ‘the world negating pessimist.’ The neo-understanding clears the monistic colouring of Śaṅkara’s concept of reality and situates it as ‘non-dual,’ which respects the reality of the One Transcendent and Immanent *Ātman-Brahman* and the ontological dependent existence of the phenomenal universe.

II

Bradley J. Malkovsky

Bradley J. Malkovsky is Assistant Professor of Comparative Theology at the University of Notre-Dame, Indiana, U.S.A. He has published articles in the *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*, *The Journal of Religion*, *Horizons* and *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. Malkovsky claims that the last half century of Indological research, especially that undertaken by western scholars, has seen the emergence of new interpretations of Śaṅkara’s doctrine. Often the traditional approach to Śaṅkara has been to read and interpret him almost exclusively through the lens of the innumerable commentaries and sub-commentaries and his work from within the Advaita tradition. In this

method the supposed doctrinal unity of Śaṅkara and his successors was presupposed. Advaitins explained the difference that came about by claiming that these were refinements or as a logical unfolding of the master's thought by his later disciples in the sense of an organic development that faithfully preserves Śaṅkara's doctrine and intent. This assumption of the doctrinal unity however has been challenged in the last few decades and foremost among them has been Richard V. De Smet.⁷

Commenting on De Smet's scholarly contribution Malkovsky opines that De Smet, approached Śaṅkara both as an Indologist and as a Roman Catholic theologian and that much of his life's work was devoted to reconcile what he considered to be the authentic teachings of Śaṅkara with Christian thinking as expressed by Aquinas. De Smet, it bears repeating, noted similarities in the theological method and doctrine of the Aquinas and Śaṅkara. This last point has been illustrated by a few examples. Both teachers, De Smet opines, subordinates reason to the authority of revealed scripture.⁸ Both teachers make liberation the ultimate goal of their teaching, a liberation that De Smet called, "the blissful intellectual experience of the Godhead and the complete cessation of man's ignorance."⁹ Further the views on nature of the supreme reality by Śaṅkara and Aquinas demonstrated a remarkable convergence. *Brahman* and God in se, for Aquinas are each characterized as absolutely simple and undivided, plenitude of being, transcendent, changeless, eternal, free, infinite and ineffable. De Smet also notes the similar use of the analogical method (*laksana*) in Śaṅkara and Aquinas in arriving at a proper theoretical understanding of the Absolute. The three steps of *via affirmationis*, *via negationis* and *via eminentiae* employed by Christian scholastics closely correspond to Śaṅkara's use of the triple-method of (1) *adhyasa* or *adhyaropa*: attempted predication of *Brahman* using ordinary meanings of words, (2) *apavada*: negation or elimination of the finite meanings of these terms, culminating in (3) *paramartha-laksana*: a legitimate supreme indication of *Brahman* (Malkovsky, 2000: 11). Therefore, analogy is capable of indirectly indicating the supreme reality without formally or properly defining it. Malkovsky claims that these examples of doctrinal correlation between Śaṅkara and Aquinas are fully acceptable to Advaitins and are not subject to dispute or controversy.

Malkovsky is of the opinion that it would wrong to conclude that De Smet regarded Śaṅkara as valuable and his metaphysical position as true only to the degree that the Advaitin concurred with the doctrine of Aquinas.

7 Bradley J. Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 9.

8 See the *Theological Method of Sankara* (note 3).

9 Richard V. De Smet, "Sankara and Aquinas on Liberation (*Mukti*)," *Indian Philosophical Annual* 5 (1969), 239.

De Smet regarded Śaṅkara's system as the pinnacle of all the metaphysical systems produced in India's history. De Smet readily acknowledged the uniqueness of Śaṅkara's contribution to the understanding of deity and world. The more he studied Śaṅkara and grappled with his thought the more De Smet grew in his regard of the Vedantin. Malkovsky writes that De Smet's many years of thoughtful attention to Śaṅkara's teaching of non-duality, for example sensitized him to new ways of understanding and articulating the interior presence of the Creator to the creature. A few years before his death he wrote, "From Śaṅkara I learned to focus on the non-dualistic creative presence in me—and in all creatures—of the absolute *Brahman* as my constant Ground and Cause and thus Supreme *Saksin* and *Ātman*" (Malkovsky, 2000: 11).

This last statement opens up an important point to be understood from the Śaṅkara-Aquinas comparison: even where numerous doctrinal similarities exist between Śaṅkara and Aquinas, differences of emphasis in the two systems need to be made clear. It is not Śaṅkara and Aquinas were saying the same things in different ways. For Śaṅkara the centre around which the whole of Śaṅkara's thought revolved was the realization of *Brahman* as one's true *Ātman*, the liberating experience of the unoriginated and non-dual Ground as one's Self. Aquinas on the other hand was oriented to the free historical presence of the divine to the human, culminating in a communion of persons in both love and knowledge. De Smet convinced of the compatibility of these two types of presences went so far as to declare that ontologically Christian personalism presupposed a non-dualistic metaphysics. De Smet felt that even on the plane of experience, too, non-dualistic presence and personal interactive presence should be regarded as complementary. It cannot be denied, however that De Smet, Christian theologian that he was, characteristically held the second type of divine presence—a communion based on love—to offer greater intimacy with the divine and hence to be more excellent.¹⁰ As a result, De Smet saw it as his main theological task as a Christian theologian in dialogue with Advaitin thinkers to open Hindu non-dualistic thought to the possibility that the highest *Brahman* was more than a vast ocean of pure consciousness, that it was also capable of love, causation and grace, but in such a way that the simplicity, plenitude and transcendence of the divine were in no way compromised. Now this view is possible only if non-duality is read as a doctrine of creation rather than as a teaching of illusionistic monism.

10 Richard V. De Smet, "Love Versus Identity," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1980), 519-526.

However, this standpoint of De Smet becomes the bone of contention with those familiar with the Advaita tradition. They are bound to take exception to De Smet's interpretation of *Brahman* as cause, more specifically, will dispute the notion that in a non-dualistic metaphysics the higher (para) *Brahman* could be creator and supreme Person. This understanding of the Absolute runs counter to orthodox non-dualist doctrine. This is because for the Advaitins, generally "non-duality" (a-dvaita) is taken to mean acosmic illusionism, the denial that anything ultimately exists but the one *Brahman*, the supreme reality. Hence, the active relational creator God and gracious personal Lord of devotional religion — in both Christian and Hindu traditions — is regarded by Advaitins as a projection of ignorance and relegated to a finally illusory ontological status. (Malkovsky, 2000: 13). De Smet's greatest contribution to the encounter between Christian theology and Śaṅkara's Vedānta can be found in his doctrines of non-dualistic realism and of the personhood of the *para-Brahman*. These doctrines on one hand, they broadened and deepened the contemporary understanding and appreciation of Śaṅkara's teaching and achievement. While on the other hand, a discussion of these two doctrines provided the opportunity for De Smet to correct what he considered Advaitic misunderstandings concerning Christian teaching about God and creation, the elimination of which might eventually lead to a deeper theological encounter between Hindu Advaitins and Christian theologians. (Malkovsky, 2000: 13). One of the main objections made by the Advaitin thinkers to Christian doctrine is that the God of Christians is not a true Absolute. From the Advaitin perspective, the Christian insistence that ultimate reality is personal reveals an all too human and limited conception of deity.¹¹ Divine Personalism in the Advaita critique is taken for anthropomorphism. Therefore, when English became an important idiom of Indian thought it is not surprising therefore that the *nirguna Brahman* of Śaṅkara's system has been regularly described as "impersonal," by Advaitins. Given the context of modern usage of the term "personal" this reduction of personhood to human like nature is understandable (Malkovsky, 2000: 14). "Today it is practically impossible to convince the Hindus that the personal God of Christianity is really the Absolute and as a rule the non-dualists among them consider that the Christians have inherited only an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity."¹²

11 Looking back on his many years of dialogue, De Smet noted how this was a recurring problem. "How often a Hindu told me, 'What a pity that you believe in a personal God.'" See De Smet, "Interphilosophical and Religious Dialogue in my Life," in *Pilgrims of Dialogue*, Fr Albert Nambiaparambil Festschrift, ed. A. Pushparajan (Ernakulam: Sangam Dialogue Centre, 1991), 6.

12 Richard V. De Smet, "Towards an Indian View of the Person," in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, ser. 2, ed. M. Chatterjee (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), 54.

All the same, "person" need not be understood in a limited sense. As De Smet explains, the person is "the ultimate subject of...attribution of all predicates implying intellectual agency," (De Smet, 1974: 53), a definition that is applicable to both human and divine, but must be applied analogically to the Absolute if the danger of anthropomorphic reductionism is to be avoided. All the same, even after the analogical method has helped ensure that a more precise and accurate understanding of all the personhood of the Absolute has been arrived at, the mystery of the Supreme remains. It is never fully penetrated or comprehended. Only an analogous and elevated understanding of the personhood succeeds in properly indicating that the divine is in some sense personal.

But it fails to fully comprehend or express the manner of divine personhood.¹³ Malkovsky quotes Jules Lipner here: "The Advaitic absolute is trans-personal rather than impersonal. Indeed, when he is constrained to describe *Brahman-Ātman* in positive (analogical) terms, Śaṅkara prefers to use such 'person-predicates' as 'consciousness' and 'bliss.'" ¹⁴ Hence, *Para Brahman*, transcends the ordinary human mode of personhood, but is surely not less personal. When conceived in this analogical sense, writes De Smet,

There will no doubt that we may and must say that Brahman even considered in the strict Advaita perspective of Śaṅkara's Vedānta is most properly and eminently personal, indeed the Super-Person. How could the supreme Ātman whose integrity is pure Consciousness and whose freedom is absolute not be supremely personal? Its very *nirgunatva* and *akhandatva* are the marks of its perfection and fullness as person. The term 'person' is therefore perfectly suitable as an appellation of the absolute Brahman of Advaita Vedānta.¹⁵

13 Richard V. De Smet, "Is the Concept of 'Person' Congenial to Sankara Vedānta," *Indian Philosophical Annual* 8 (1972), 200.

14 Jules Lipner, "Sankara on Metaphor," *Indian Philosophy of Religion*, ed. R. W. Perrett (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 169.

15 Richard V. De Smet, "Is the Concept of 'Person' Congenial to Sankara Vedānta?" *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies* 12 (1973) 201. No less an authority on Advaita than T. M. P. Mahadevan declared at a seminar in India in the 1970s on the concept of person that "if the Brahman of Sankara is anything, it is surely not impersonal." See De Smet, "Toward an Indian View of the Person," 51. De Smet attributed this "important linguistic change" regarding the personhood of Brahman to the influence of Catholic scholars living in India. Mahadevan's affirmation of divine personhood of Brahman remains a rarity among Advaitin scholars. Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedānta*, 15. Ivo Coelho in his article, "Fr. Richard De Smet (1916-97): Reminiscences," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 8 (1997) 5, too writes about T. M. P. Mahadevan's stance saying that, "There was T. M. P. Mahadevan of the University of Madras, for

That the Absolute is personal, it must be stressed here, does not require that it be a creator. Neither God in Christian thought nor the supreme *Brahman* of Śaṅkara as interpreted by De Smet is necessitated to bring forth a world for the Absolute to be itself. Rather the supreme reality freely chooses to be a world creator and governing Isvara without thereby undergoing in the slightest degree a modification of its perfection and fullness.¹⁶

Here then the question arises whether the existence of a real world is a logical possibility given the infinity and fullness of being that is *Brahman*. Is there a place for the world in Advaitic metaphysics? For De Smet, only if the world is a contingent reality and is not accorded the same absolute ontological status as its source. At the same time, it is then the world to be regarded as a mere illusion? For De Smet, when Śaṅkara uses negatives in describing the supreme, such usage must not be understood in an absolute sense, as if Śaṅkara were simply denying the existence of the universe. Rather, Śaṅkara must be regarded as “a radical valuationist who measures everything to the absolute Value, the *Brahman* and declares its inequality to it rather than the degree of its participation of it. This manner of thinking and speaking is legitimate but it has misled many into acosmic interpretations of Śaṅkara’s doctrine”¹⁷ De Smet further goes on to add:

St. Thomas generally prefers the language of participation. A participated being is in its own deficient way what the absolute *Esse* is without any restrictions. This *Esse* or Being is not a logical genus but the ontological Reality of God. And its participations are not parts of that partless Reality, nor accidents, complements, explications or developments of it, nor in any way additive to it.¹⁸

This would mean that both Aquinas and Śaṅkara attribute the same ontological status to the world, for both of them the world enjoys a relative reality. Their description of the world in either more negative or positive terms is due to their centre of reference and chosen emphasis.

instance, who used to openly criticize De Smet. It seems that at the end of his life, this well-known scholar quietly began to accept the fact that Sankara indeed taught *jagad-ajahal laksana*. But if Sankara taught analogy then whole monistic tradition falls...and the sections on creation and causality in the *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya* deserve a closer look.”

16 From a letter written to Bradley J. Malkovsky.

17 Richard V. De Smet, “Origin: Creation and Emanation,” 275.

18 *Ibid.*, 275.

Therefore, Śaṅkara “does not deny the universal causality, lordship etc. of *Brahman*—for they are logically entailed by the true fact of the world’s ontological dependence upon it—but only that they affect the simplicity of its essences.”¹⁹ *Brahman* is therefore truly and logically the cause and Lord of the universe, but these relations do not subject the divine essence to any change, nor are they ontologically additive to the divine reality. (De Smet, 1989: 62). Considering the relation of *Brahman* to the world as cause, Lord, and so forth, “cannot be ontological but logical only. They are intrinsic attributes (*visesana*) but extrinsic denominators (*upadhi*).”²⁰ *Brahman* being absolutely simple and a plentitude of being, its perfection cannot be altered by the fact of creation. Whereas, the creature’s very being is constituted by its relation or dependence on its source. (De Smet, 1980: 552). The relation of *Brahman* to the world in no way defines the ontological nature of the Absolute. This is what Śaṅkara appears to mean when he says, “Names and forms in all their states have their *Ātman* and *Brahman* alone, but *Brahman* has not its *Ātman* in them” (*Tai. U. Bh.* II. 6.1). However, the relation of the world to *Brahman* defines the ontological nature of the world. It is dependent on its transcendent and immanent source for every facet of its existence (Malkovsky, 2000: 17).

Conclusion

Sara Grant’s rigorous exegetical investigation reveals that Śaṅkarācārya’s Advaita Vedānta embraces a qualified notion of relation between *Brahman* and the world, grounded in a careful ontological stratification that transcends simplistic binaries of real and unreal. Her insights restore philosophical legitimacy to relational discourse within non-dualism, emphasizing the epistemic role of the metaphysical inquirer who navigates the terrain between absolute identity and empirical plurality. Complementing this, Bradley J. Malkovsky’s theological approach highlights the crucial and nuanced role of divine grace in Śaṅkara’s soteriology. His work challenges reductive readings of Advaita as purely self-dependent, instead presenting liberation as a dynamic collaboration between human realization and divine agency. This recognition of grace adds a vital dimension to understanding Śaṅkara’s vision, making his teachings more resonant with theological traditions that emphasize the role of divine participation.

19 Richard V. De Smet, “Radhakrishnan’s Interpretation of Sankara,” *Radhakrishnan Centenary Volume*, ed. G. Parthasarathi and D. P. Chattopadhyay (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 62.

20 Richard V. De Smet, “Forward Steps in Shankara Research,” *Darshana International* 26 (1987), 62.

Together, Grant and Malkovsky's perspectives enrich contemporary scholarship by offering a comprehensive and dialogical account of Śaṅkara's doctrine—one that honors both its metaphysical subtlety and its soteriological depth. Their contributions open pathways for fruitful engagement between classical Indian philosophy and modern theological and philosophical thought, affirming the continuing relevance of Advaita Vedānta in global intellectual discourse.

8

Śaṅkara as Śrutivādin **Richard De Smet's Interpretation –** **A Critical Appraisal**

Prof. S. Lourdunathan & John Peter Vallabadoss

One of the contributions of Richard De Smet to Indian thought is his interpretation of Śaṅkara as *Śrutivādin*. Beginning from 1946, a systematic study of Hinduism as well as Sanskrit helped Richard De Smet write a thesis on the theological method of Śaṅkara showing him as *śrutivādin* who subordinated reason to the revealed (*apauruṣeya*) scriptures. De Smet developed courses on Indian studies in *Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth* while teaching there, and composed highly condensed class notes for students under the title 'Guidelines in Indian Philosophy.' He interpreted Śaṅkara as a non-dualist realist rather than a world-denying illusionist; and he demonstrated personhood of Brahman.

1. Śaṅkara as Śrutivādin: De Smet's Arguments¹

De Smet's thesis on theological method of Śaṅkara asserts that Śaṅkara has been *Śruti-vādin*, a theorist of revelatory scriptural knowledge, rather than a mere philosophical theorist or a rationalistic ontology or an idealistic

¹ The entire section is a summary of the ideas of De Smet from his notes on *Vedantadarsana*. Refer Richard De Smet, *Guidelines to Indian Philosophy*, ed., Ivo Coelho (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2022), 132ff.

absolutism. To establish his thought, De Smet analyses the approach and focus of Śāṅkara on *Śruti* as an epistemic purport of achieving *Brahmajñāna*.

- 1) Though Śāṅkara accepting all six *pramāṇas* as valid sources of knowledge, relies much on the *śruti* as absolute means of bringing in *Brahma-jñāna*, the true knowledge of *Brahman*, the absolute Real. Even though other *pramāṇas* are quite valid within their own sphere, bringing in the 'reals' of the ordinary knowledge, they subserve the purpose of *Śruti*, as 'handmaids.' *Śruti*, for Śāṅkara, means essentially the *jñāna-khanda*, the Upaniṣads. The other parts of revealed texts like *karma-khanda* renders humans fit for the knowledge of Brahman. Other empirical *pramāṇas* are required for this part of *śruti*, which is the concern of *pūrva-mīmāṃsā*. Empirical truth, *vyavahāra-satya*, such as *jīvātman*, the *manas*, the atoms, etc., are obtained through them. The meta-empirical Real, the absolutely Existent, *param'āṛthata vastu-sat*, can be ascertained by no other means than the *jñāna-khanda*, the area of *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*.
- 2) Vedāntins like Rāmānuja and other non-Śāṅkarians opt for *karma-jñāna-samuccaya*, conjoining the two, arguing that ritual practices are a means of attaining the knowledge of Brahman and worship always accompanies the knowledge. But Śāṅkara rejects this position and stands entirely on *Jñāna*, for no action can lead to *mokṣa*. However he does not deny that religious practice or *niṣkāma karma*, may induce virtuous dispositions favourable to the study of Vedānta in establishing a helpful selflessness.
- 3) Validating *Śruti* as independent authority within its own domain, Śāṅkara upholds the omniscience of *śruti* as valid, eternal and *apauruṣeya* source. In support of this thesis, he agrees with Mīmāṃsika Śabara's theory of speech that the knowledge arises apart from any contact with an object (*Mīmāṃsa Sutra Bhasya*, 1,1,5). Other theory is that knowledge of speech is created by the mind embodying its concepts in the sounds of speech, where the *śabda* is dependent on a *puruṣa*. The *sphoṭavāda* of Bhartṛhari, Maṇḍanamiśra and other Grammarians, postulates a meta-empirical, undivided, unanalyzable, eternal sound-entity (*sphoṭa*) of each word and sentence. For Naiyāyikas, every sound is a vibration lasting only for three *kṣaṇas* which by its association within the mind with the impressions (*saṃskāra*) made by the previous sounds, yields the meaning of words and sentences, implying *pauruṣeyatva* theory. Whereas, Śāṅkara relies on *varṇavāda*, by which the knowledge derived from speech is the

series of the syllables or letters (*varṇa*) themselves as recollected, thanks to the accumulated impulsions produced by the direct knowledge one has had before each letter, word and meaning of the word. The theory implies an objective one, consisting of the ever same letters, syllables, arranged in word-series and sentence-series as we find in the *śruti*-texts, and a subjective element of their correct recollection.

- 4) Śāṅkara adopts *varṇavāda*, saying that all knowledge has been produced by that great being, Brahman by way of play, as humans send forth their breath. Hence they are eternal and omniscient. The *mantras* are consciousness of the Ātman. Subjectively the intellect, *buddhi* has the power of synthesizing what the senses apprehend in succession. Thus, verbal knowledge is caused by the intrinsic nature, *svabhāva* of the letters, (*Brahma Sutra Bhasyam* 1,3,28), but not without the synthesizing function of *buddhi*.
- 5) Further, Śāṅkara says that it is only with the help of the *śruti*, that this exceedingly deep Brahman can be fathomed, not of reasoning, (*B.S.Bh.* 2,1,31). As to the *Ātman*, which is not the object of perception, neither it is provable by inference, but while actually following the *śruti*, *ātman* is knowable. As to the *Brahman*, it transcends the empirical realms of perception, reasoning, not even expressible by words.
- 6) Limitation of *śruti* is in its dependence not to oppose the other *pramāṇas* or their own declarations regarding the matters lying within the range of perception and reasoning.

These considerations of Śāṅkara are important to the right understanding of his teaching on the epistemic purport of *Śruti* on the knowledge of Brahman.

2. DeSmet's Interpretation of Śāṅkara's Vedic Hermeneutics

For Mīmāṃsā, the only purpose of *śruti* is to direct man in the performance of ritual actions. Vedic commands, *vidhi*, *codanā*, are primary and other texts are secondary praises, meant to subserve them. But, for Śāṅkara, purpose of *śruti* is to lead man towards the realization of Ātman-Brahman; hence the *mahā-vākyas* are the primary texts. He dethrones the *vidhis* and enthrones the *mahāvākyas*. To determine what is *mahāvākya*, Śāṅkara uses an important exegetical rule, giving preference to the literal and primary meaning whenever possible. Secondary meaning, with text and context, *lakṣanā*, is allowed but only when a sentence cannot make sense otherwise. De Smet elaborates on Śāṅkara's interpretation on one of the *mahāvākyas*, namely *tatvamasi*, and shows how the primary meaning of the sentence is aimed at the realization of identity of Atman-Brahman.

According Śaṅkara, *śruti* discards the many false opinions regarding ‘I’, ‘Ātman’, the self, such as: ‘consciousness is the mere body as endowed with the quality of intelligence, as in *lokāyatika*; as only the senses as intelligent which is held by other materialists; as the *manas*; as the ‘only awareness - *viññāna-mātra*,’ which is momentary, *kṣaṇika*, meaning that the self is the really discontinuous series of minute moments of awareness, as in *yogācāra*; as the void, *śūnya* as in *Mādhyaṃikas*; as the transmigrating entity, *saṃsārin*, distinct from the body, as both agent and enjoyer, held by Naiyāyikas; as only the enjoyers, pure *jñā*, not agent as in *Sāṃkhya*; as different from that, being the Lord, *Īśvara*, omniscient and omnipotent as held by *Īśvaravādins*. Contrary to all such opinions, Śaṅkara holds that the Self is ‘Ātman of the enjoyer, *ātmā sa bhoktur-iti*’ or ‘Ātman of the knower, *jñātur-ātmā*’ or ‘Ātman of the agent, *kartur-ātmā*.’ For him, Ātman is pure awareness. Often the failure to discriminate the three, *ātman*, reflection and reflector lead to confusion: as in Buddhists ‘intellect as self-luminous,’ or in Naiyāyikas ‘these are consciousness and are changing and transient.’

Consciousness, *caitanya*, is immutable, and it cannot be a changing knower but only the witness, *sākṣin*, *dr̥ś* or illuminator, *cetā* which by itself is *svayam-jyoti*. The self is consciousness, the pure ‘I’, the stable witness, *sākṣin* of all the modifications, the inner eye and undeclined ‘seer’, *dr̥ś*. The witness is never ‘witnessed,’ as if it were an object to be illumined, but realized as Witness, as absolute Subject, as pure consciousness. This realization is liberation, *mukti*, which can happen even in this life, *jīvan-mukti*. *Mukti*, however, is not a becoming, or a becoming clear, but a being known, being established as *sākṣin* and *sat*.

3. Problems in the Interpretation of *Śruti*

Purushottama Bilimoria introduces the practice of reading the intricacies of *śruti* texts, discerning meaning hidden behind ‘impersonal’ texts, and its far-reaching ramifications in the social and religious discourses.² “In the beginning was the word (*śabda*); The word was with Meaning (*artha*); The word was Meaning (*śabdibhāvana*); And it is This that speaketh.” The science of interpretation, hermeneutics, as an attempt to interpret, to make meaning, draws its source from the Greek mythical figure, Hermes – the messenger of gods and his duty “to make something clear, to announce or to unveil a message.” From Hindu perspective of *vac*, *śabda*, the interpretation is *mīmāṃsā*, the art of understanding the speech or voice or text of another. It is a creative exploration of meaning in the fertile area of words. The

2 Purushottama Bilimoria, “Being and Text: Dialogic Fecundation of Western Hermeneutics and Hindu Mīmāṃsā in the Critical Era,” in *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons*, eds., R. D. Sherma & A. Sharma (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008), 45-79.

Mīmāṃsā School is grounded in the inviolable authority of the Vedas over any personal authority, be it divine or human. Unlike other *āstika* systems of Hindu thought, Mīmāṃsā school bases itself not as a faith-based theology, *albeit* ritual thinking, but rooted in reasoning with jurisprudence, reflection, linguistic analysis, and argumentative logic, *nyāya*. Equally it distances from a-theistic Śramaṇic lineage. “It [Mīmāṃsā] is then better described as *kāstika*, not the negation as such but a disputer of the presuppositions of what came to be and continues to hound Indian thought and culture as the *āstika* orthodoxology.”³ In Mīmāṃsā, there is a rich area of dialogic or interactive hermeneutical task.

Further, Daya Krishna demonstrates that few interpreters of the Vedic corpus have selected out different parts of the Vedas at different points in time, designating them as *śruti*, ignoring the rest of the Vedic corpus.⁴ What constitutes the *śruti* textual corpus and who are the authoritative interpreters of those texts, are questions to be answered uncontroversially clear and acceptable for all. His thoughtful and probing questions undermine the notion of *śruti* as transcendently secured truth and bring it in line with other sources of knowledge from the world of the mundane. The term ‘Veda’ is generally used to refer to a large, disparate variety of texts with little unity, except the one imposed by interpretative tradition. There are no Mīmāṃsā commentaries on the major Upaniṣads, nor any direct detailed Vedāntic commentaries on the Saṃhitā and Brāhmaṇa. This large-scale ignoring of integral parts of the text of the Vedas has not troubled anyone, either in the past or in the present. Yet the scholars talk about the authority of the *śruti* and the lay public continues to accept it blindly on their authority. Bādarāyaṇa vedantic camp regards the major Upaniṣads as the real *śruti*, and values the differences in the interpretation of the same.

Mīmāṃsā confined the term *śruti* to the part of the Vedic corpus dealing with sacrificial injunctions, and regarded all other parts as merely in relation to the former. Daya Krishna laments, “All this is fairly well-known, though its devastating implications for the concept of *śruti* are seldom realized or, even when realized, tend to be underplayed by most scholars who write on the subject.” Even among the Saṃhitas of the Vedic canon, only threefold Holy Knowledge is talked about refusing to recognize the fourth Saṃhita because of certain prejudice prevailing against it. The two *sūtra* texts, *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* and *Brahmasūtra* articulating the meaning of the Vedic

3 *Ibid.*, 46.

4 Daya Krishna, “The Mīmāṃsāka versus the Yājñika: Some Further Problems in the Interpretation of Śruti,” in *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna*, eds. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Daniel Raveh (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 228-244.

corpus tend to center either on *dharma* or *Brahman*, selective of portions of Vedas. Both *sūtras* assume *śruti* to be a closed affair and surprisingly treat their own interpretation as an open question, giving primacy to their own selection and relative importance to other portions of the *śruti*. The revelation in Vedic corpus is not confined just to one of the issues selected, performance of sacrifices or knowledge of Brahman. The problem appears to have been so crucial and divisive.

Louis Renou in his book, titled *Le Destin du Veda dans l'Inde*, exposes the myth of the authority of the Vedas and the myths die hard.⁵ The plurality of the *śruti* cannot be mitigated. "The idea of *śruti* seems thus to be far more variegated and complex than the manner in which it has been understood in the light of the usual presentation of Mīmāṃsā and the Vedānta up till now. It is time that we look at the way the idea of *śruti* has developed over this long period of time and the diverse uses..." The diversity in the interpretation of the *śruti*, the text itself is supposed to proclaim and demand its multiple interpretation, so as to say, sanctions it through its own authority. The multiple interpretations of the text is both possible due to the diverse prejudices of its interpreters and due to textual scope with no determinate, unambiguous, not fully actualized meaning of its own. What was to be really regarded as the *śruti* proper has never been very clear as what is to be included under the term 'Veda' has never been unambiguous.

The authority of the Veda had been challenged explicitly by Mahāvīra and the Buddha, and within the Vedic tradition through a foundational schism between those considering either Brāhmaṇa or the Upaniṣads as central. In other words, *yajña*-centric and *jñāna*-centric interpretations, either by Kumārila or Śaṅkara initiated the schism. Some Naiyāyikas too treated the Vedas as the creation of Īśvara or God. The non-Advaitic ācārya, Yāmuna, after the period of Śaṅkara, established the status of *śruti* to the Āgamic texts in his work, *Āgama Prāmāṇya*.

4. *Nava-Śruti*: Newness of Revealed Truths

Daya Krishna encouraged critical thinking about plurality, a balance between locality and globality. He consciously strove to set the past in relation to India's present, and future, enabling a richer blending of tradition and innovation. Sharp questions give birth only to many other good questions. Daya Krishna succeeded in questioning the foundation of the classical theory of the absolute authoritativeness of the Vedas and Upaniṣads, inquiring the notions of eternity, superhuman origin, self-authoritativeness, absoluteness. From Daya Krishna's point of view, the past is for the present.

5 Louis Renou, *Le Destin du Veda dans l'Inde - The Destiny of the Veda in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965).

The new present will shape the future. Ancestral voices of the 'past' might have reached us centuries ago. Many opened their ears. Some closed them, in order to 'hear' and 'listen' better the voices of the 'present' from the 'Future' beckoning us and challenging to 'think' and 'act' differently but creatively.

Daya Krishna calls for a 'dialogue' with the written word, as he says, "The tradition of questioning continues and many of the beliefs accepted as unquestionably true, are subjected to a close scrutiny that reveals them to be totally unfounded."⁶ Continuity in dialogical aspect of search for truth is very much needed. Nothing is 'immune' to philosophical scrutiny, which is of the capacity of revealing 'problems' and 'inconsistencies,' which are part and parcel of every text. These of course do not undermine the strength and value of the text. Ancestors are alright, but one is to 'remember' them, not just for a day, but for the whole rest of the year. Their achievement is well-known. We shall not be what we are without them. Their 'failures' are equally responsible for what we illustrate in our life perpetually. If the stories of them as the sacred texts are to be believed, we still look forward to reading and writing new texts that are sacred now and for the future.

Act of Revelation could never be the same; an active speaker and a passive receptor. *Nava-śruti* is the process of dialogical reciprocity. There is no one speaker and one receptor. Both are speakers and both are active listeners. Truth is not much 'heard' but 'discerned' and 'seen' together. Even in writing, the writer has no monopoly of imposing his truth claims; one engages in *ālāpa*, an opening of dialoguing with the readers. The large part of the 'written' texts, *smṛti*, is the product of engagement with the listeners and readers. Oral transmission might sound ancient, in the era of writing and reading but the repetitive oral practices enabled the listeners to absorb that which has been said and remembered. It is the matter of thinking out loud, in the present, in the now, without being imprisoned with the net of already 'written' word, the frozen expression.

In alternative understanding of Indian tradition, Daya Krishna was deeply critical of the enterprise of reducing Indian philosophy to archaeology; for him it is a living, changing tradition. In the context of resurgence of neo-vedānta of 19th-20th Cen, his question, 'What is *Śruti*?' highlights how each *śākhā*, has its own *saṃhitās*, *brāhmaṇas*, *āraṇyakas* and *upaniṣads*; and it is only with *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* and the *Brahmasūtra* that the idea of a unified *śruti* arose. For Daya Krishna one of the strategies for conceptual creativity is not only a reverential attitude to revealed texts or divine testimonies an impediment to original path-breaking searches for truth, even while

6 Daya Krishna, *New Perspectives in Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Rawat publications, 2001), 1.

studying insightful originals, the scholarly historical hermeneutic of trying to establish one definitive and real meaning of the text or the author always stands in the way to genuine creativity. So, the remedy would be to study texts but never with the purpose of digging out the author's meaning but to use the text as a prop in an imaginative game of meaning-making. And recommendation is to treat the most important texts in one's tradition, as occasions for starting but never completing an imaginary dialogue with the past thinking processes of humanity.

Why to crave for secondary sources, if one has the primary. The shock of a real encounter with the original is well known, and greater shock one feels when one meets the thinker himself. There is the encounter with the person which puts all that he had said or written far behind and seems somehow strangely irrelevant to the situation. The presence of the person transcends all that he has written and even negates it. It is the person actually thinking before us, and the relation of this to his finished thought that we read earlier in his writings, is interesting. Seeing the thought arising in the person, before our very eyes. It is to see it in a different way than when one finds it finished, frozen, congealed in the book.

5. *Śruti* – Source and Means of *Brahmajñāna*

Śruti as logical source of *brahmajñāna* – *śruti* as source of knowledge of things which cannot be known through any other sources. *Śruti* provides means of attaining good and avoiding evil which cannot be known by perception or inference. Knowledge of *dharma* and *Brahman*, super sensuous realities beyond the senses is possible only by *śruti*. Incompetence of sense perception in knowing *Brahman*, as each sense organ is naturally capable of grasping that which is appropriate to its own nature, so impossible for senses to learn about *dharma*. *Śruti* is the adequate source, as it consists of words. Nature of *Brahman* and fundamental human spiritual problem is one of *avidya* and the knowledge derived from *śruti* is a fully adequate solution. Words of *śruti* are not acquired to produce *Brahman* or to demonstrate its existence, because *Brahman* is self-revealing and always manifest. *Śruti* is fruitful source and Vedas have their proper purpose in inculcating *dharma*.

Anantanand Rambachan presents Advaitic epistemology that *Śruti* alone is the authoritative source of *brahmajñāna*.⁷ When Indian philosophy was initially presented to western philosophers, it is likely that its exponents were sensitive to the possibility that western philosophers might view Indian thought as religious in content, and possessing only minor philosophical

significance. The early apologists played down the role that *śruti* played in Śaṅkara's thought, thus presenting him as a rigorous philosopher rather than as a theologian dealing with Hindu Scripture. In Advaita, the higher level of truth or reality is the awareness of the ultimate, *pāramārthika* which is the state of liberation, where there is only pure knowledge of Brahman with no mental images or perception. This is *anubhava* or direct awareness. The lower level is that of practical reality or *vyāvahāra*. In this level, through the *pramanas* we get *prama* or knowledge. *Śruti* gives us such *prama*, but it is transcendental knowledge. But still it is only an approximation and gives only relative knowledge. For Śaṅkara, *Anubhava* is another source of knowledge of Brahman. The affirmations of *śruti* needs to be verified and confirmed by knowledge gained by the direct experience and therefore the authority of *śruti* is only secondary.

Brahmajñāna is a spiritual awakening, and does not happen by mere hearing about Brahman in the *śruti*. If it were so, then all would have been liberated. *Śruti*, thus acts as a catalyst, pushing one into liberation. Supplementary tasks such as reflection is needed along with *śruti*. Further, the philosophical dimension of *bhakti* which is often perceived as 'anti-intellectual emotionalism,' frees the vain, empty, dry world of intellect, and liberates philosophers from 'temple of reason.' The 'ever-seeking, ever-doubting quest by the *buddhi*,' is deeply rooted in the tradition of *bhakti*. The 'free play of reason, imagination and intellectual sensibility' as '*bauddhika yajña*,' is an 'offering' at the 'intellectual altar.'⁸ For a prepared mind, by hearing scriptural passages, one instantaneously attains liberation. *Śruti* thus plays only a temporary role, leading one to liberation like a boat used to travel a river, a finger pointing to the moon, or a ladder. *Śruti* is thus a means to an end. Once that goal is reached, it is discarded.

6. Questioning *Śruti* as Critical Source of Knowledge

Śruti as the authoritative text is held as a critical source of revelatory knowledge, in most religious traditions including Semitic religions. But the central question is about the validity of that knowledge, in relation to other sources of knowledge like *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*, with pure logical arguments in drawing valid and sound conclusions. What is the special about the revelatory source of knowledge and in what context, is the crucial question. Daya Krishna argues that one needs to make space for a 'secular' *śruti* alongside its 'sacred' counterpart. For him, it is not the textual source from which knowledge emerges that gives it its authority, but rather the

7 Anantanand Rambachan, "Sankara's Rationale for *Śruti* as the Definitive Source of *Brahmajñāna*: A Refutation of Some Contemporary Views," in *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 36, No. 1 (1986), 25-42.

8 Daya Krishna, *Bhakti: A Contemporary Discussion – Philosophical Explorations in the Indian Bhakti Tradition*, Edited by Daya Krishna, Mukund Lath and Francine E. Krishna (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2000), iii-iv.

attitudes of those readers who interpret and in this sense co-author the texts. In that sense there is no real metaphysical or epistemological difference between non-secular and secular authoritative texts.⁹

Traditions hold on to certain final authoritative texts as giving all the truth that is or can be, as providing answers to all possible questions. And yet, all that is said in *śruti*, revealed texts could not be accepted by the traditions themselves, as true, simply because that goes against general notion that what is known to be true by human rational experience, cannot be incompatible with what is claimed to be true in revealed texts. Rational quest stands in the way of the acceptance of the so-called authoritative foundation, final, complete, and infallible text. A believer in the traditional texts is forced to adopt certain strategies to find solution to obvious obscurities and inconsistencies and somehow to sustain the 'claims' of the texts; one such strategy is *arthavāda*, an attempt to save the truth claims of the texts.

Texts are bound to scrutiny of empirical knowledge and collective experience of humankind. The truth claims of '*śruti*' continuously challenges the believers, either to save the truthfulness of the texts by devising a strategy or objectively analyze their claims in the face of counter-evidences, without losing respect for the richness and the profundity of the texts. In the context of cognitive claims of truth, the meaning making, *arthavāda* divides what is authoritative and what is merely rhetorical in nature or metaphorical interpretation. Daya Krishna points out, Śaṅkara's well known statement in this regard that 'even if a hundred *śrutis* were to declare that fire is cold no one would believe it,' has generally been put aside or ignored all together.

Traditions or different sects or schools of interpretation (*sampradāyas*), hold that for a text to be regarded as *śruti*, it has to be considered as both infallible and complete. And each of them accuse the other of misinterpreting the text or doing injustice to it. But in the case of literary texts of secular nature appreciate differences in interpretation which are to add to the richness of the text and the multidimensionality of meanings content in it. Somehow texts regarded as '*śruti*' failed to do so, because of the respect to the text regarding them as not as a work of mortal human being with all its weakness, but of someone who can say nothing wrong and has said all that can ever be said on anything whatsoever.

9 Daya Krishna, "Is the Doctrine of Arthavāda Compatible with the Idea of Śruti?" Is the Doctrine of Arthavāda Compatible with the Idea of Śruti?: The Basic Dilemma for the Revelatory Texts of any Tradition in Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Daniel Raveh (eds), *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 219–227.

7. Social and Secular *Śruti*

Daya Krishna called for a decanonization of scriptural texts like *Rgveda*, stating that it is 'unbelievable,' that there were over two dozen *ṛṣikās*, and yet the Indian tradition went on to exclude women seers and the *śūdra* seers. He raised a question if *śūdras* and women are entitled to *yajña* or not. Such exclusion questions the universality of Vedic civilization. "If this is not the original sin, it is the original guilt of Hinduism or Indian civilization." Very interestingly Daya Krishna quoting Śaṅkara's treatment of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* on the episode of Satyakāma Jābāla, on the question of his *gotra* or parental lineage, whether so-called *śruti* accepting social prejudices. "The simple and straight question in this context is whether Śaṅkara treats the *Śruti* as *Śruti*, that is, as something to whose truth his own personal, social and cultural prejudices are to be subordinated and from which he has to learn and accept whatever it says, even if it be against what one has been taught to believe as right or wrong, true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, rational or irrational. Ānandagiri noting on the commentary of Śaṅkara on the same episode, shows it as an fascinating example of how human ingenuity is used to hide the unpleasant truth if it is found in a supposedly sacred, revealed text, to confirm the denial of the access of *śruti* on the part of the *Śūdras* and the access to this *śruti* will have to be confined to Brahmins alone, and denied to all of the other *varṇas*, including the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas.

The idea of *śruti* is generalized by Daya Krishna to include any texts that is treated as authoritative by any tradition, including texts of Christian and Islam, even of Marxian writings which Daya Krishna loves to call it as 'secular *śruti*.' It might appear to be a contradiction-in-terms, but in the context of some infallible authority, whether divine or super human or even human beings like Mahāvīra and Buddha, it is the authoritative attitude of normative texts determined by the community of believers of a system or a tradition. Even authority of God has not been able to convince the believers in the rival tradition to accept the revelatory authority of the texts of the Others. In assigning '*śruti*' status to writings of Marx, for example, the argument is that the coercive power of the followers of a tradition, or of a state is prevalent to impose an attitude of normative authority to texts, either to convert or to persecute the non-conformists. The 'prophetic-persecutory' complex is found in traditions, even applying to philosophical traditions like Wittgensteinians, Kantians, Hegelians, etc., in hailing the 'master' who is regarded as 'superhuman,' inevitably 'infallible' and 'complete.' The master's 'real' meaning has to be discovered to be true and profound insight to human situation and reality. In grasping the 'insight' from the author and the texts, designates someone as disciples or opponents of the master. The attitude towards understanding of the text in treating it not as something

uttered or written by a human being with all his fragilities, inconsistencies, incompleteness and unclarity – such attitude creates the ‘*śruti*’ and changes the so-called *śruti* as regarded as human creation, falling short of an aura of infallibility, subjected to inconsistencies, incoherencies contradictions. Their vain claims to truth can easily be controverted by counter-evidences. However such attitude does not disregard the positive achievements and fail to admire the insights or wonder of the Master. Once one sees all texts as human creations the attitude remains the same, appreciative and critical at the same time.

The revealed ‘sacred texts’ are innumerable in various religious traditions, which regard them as ‘revealed.’ Their devotees, disciples or followers cannot bear to treat or think them otherwise, as they learnt to revere them so and treat non-believers with contempt. Yet every follower of a particular tradition know for sure that other communities do not regard those sacred text in the same way as one does in one’s community. Paradoxically each sees the holes in the other’s claim but somehow fails to see them in one’s own. In addition every devotee or disciple feels it as their sacred duty to defend the sacred text. The notion of orthodoxy is always in opposition to heresy leading to persecution and elimination. The problem of orthodoxy and heresy may not have been fully necessitated in the content of the text itself, but is found in the interpretation by the human followers. The problems of interpretation cannot be settled as we know from the discipline of hermeneutics.

Even though Śaṅkara’s commentary on *Brahmasūtra* is itself not a *śruti*, and *Gita* not accorded the status of *śruti*, disciples of those tradition might regard it so authoritative and assign the same status as the Upaniṣads. Even the name of the master or the text does not matter, for the follower, but the contents and their interpretation whose disputes are perennial, desperate and even bloody, at least more in the cases of ‘sacred’ *śruti* than of ‘secular’ *śruti*. Conflicts, abuse and denunciation are largely prevalent, whenever certain texts are regarded as *śruti*, sacred or secular.

8. *Ṛṣikās* - Women Seers of Truth

In re-reading and re-editing the *Rgveda*, the most revered text of the Indian tradition, Daya Krishna was interested in the ‘voice of the *ṛṣikās* female *ṛṣis*, and analysed with textual criticism on the *sūktas*, vedic hymns ascribed to the *ṛṣis* and the *ṛṣikās*, all hymns scattered in the different *maṇḍalas*. He sought to reveal a hitherto unnoticed layer of the text, and scissored out those which were not original. His Jaipur edition of the *Rgveda*, was the project of rereading as rewriting, showcasing that the traditional text, the most revered text, could also be subjected to hermeneutically and necessarily

‘open-ended’ and ‘made for’ continuous revision, modification, extension, and enhancement.

Something new was occurring in the late Vedic period by the fact that women *ṛṣis* came into their own and speak with a voice though embarrassing to many, is distinctly their own. Surprisingly, the male voice when it talks like this, does not seem to embarrass anyone, but when a Yamī (Rg 10.10), Urvaśī (Rg 10.95), a Romaśā (Rg 1.126), Lopāmudrā or Indrāṇī (Rg 10.86) speak out, most people do not like it. Women *Ṛṣikās* do not always speak with one voice or are concerned only with expressing their viewpoint on intimate aspects of personal life. Like their male counterparts, they have cosmological reflection as in Rg 10.125 where Vāk Āmbhṛṇī sees herself as identical in essence with all the gods and everything else. Śraddhā Kāmāyanī talks about *śraddhā* as being the most fundamental thing in life, as without it, life can have neither roots nor meaning (Rg 10.151). Sūrya Sāvitrī described her marriage with a systematic ambiguity, giving a message to Sūrya, the sun god. *Ṛṣikās* did write *sūktas* in honour of gods, like Ghoṣā Kākṣivati addresses the Aśvins (Rg 10.39-40). All *sūktas* ascribed to women *ṛṣis* deserve an independent study of their own. All occur in the 10th *maṇḍala* of the *Rgveda* and are generally not related to the *ṛṣis* of the major lineages, though there are exceptions.

The presence of Sāparājñī amongst the *ṛṣikās* suggests that the tribals were being co-opted into the Vedic fold, including the women belonging to them. *Sūkta* 10.175 is attributed to a tribal *ṛṣi* called Sarpa. The tribals and women are to play a more important part in the late Vedic period and they belong to the various professions other than priestly class, like Rathakāra, Niṣādasthapati or Dhānāka (10.35-36) or Tvaṣṭa Garhbakartā (10.184) or Śīśu Āṅgīrasa (9.112). Curiously studying different *maṇḍalas* of *Rgveda*, Daya Krishna discovers that not only a strategy was adopted to reduce the number of gods to a manageable proportion, a scheme of appellation of new *ṛṣis*, not belonging to the lineage of seven *Ṛṣis*, āṅgīrasa/Bhārgava, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Ātreya, Bhāradvāja and Vāsiṣṭha, Kāṇva, etc.,

The issue of animal’s right to be sacrificed and woman’s right to perform sacrifice on the basis of the claim to gender equality, are met only with male chauvinist response from Aitiśāyana (*Mimāṃsāsūtra* 6.1.6) or from Bādarāyaṇa (*Mimāṃsāsūtra* 6.1.8) who seems liberal arguing that it was not the gender difference that could be important as the reference was to the human race, *manuṣyājati* as a whole. Both men and women are both entitled to the performance of sacrifices, but they are separately and equally entitled, or only jointly as husband and wife, and then too unequally. Jha concludes the discussion stating the sociocultural conditions of the times, “the wife does not stand on the same footing as the husband in the matter of the performance of details.” Though unequal, women were at least granted

conditional right of participation in the sacrifices. The problem of exclusion continues to haunt the Vedic interpreters with a dilemma as a result of the conflicting pulls of their respect and allegiance to the *śruti* texts and the imperative of maintaining their authority at all costs, and the social pressure.

Along with women right, debate on the right of the *śūdras* starting from *sūtra* 6.1.25 and continuing to 6.1.40. The exclusion is in the injunction, “The *Śūdras* shall not read the Veda” (*Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 6.1.37, 1001) and “The *śūdra* is like the cremation ground, therefore, one should not read the Veda near a *Śūdra*” (*Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 6.1.38, 1002). Even though these injunction do not have an exact reference in the Vedas and exclusion is for reading the Veda, not for performance, unless one assumes a study of the Vedas is a necessary condition for the performance. The strange thing about the discussion on a very sensitive issue in the context of the orthodox Vedic tradition, both then and now, is almost willful blindness to the obvious contradictions involved in the contention. Further, in *Brahmasūtra*, the entitlement to knowledge of the ultimate reality, Brahman, is denied to *Śūdras* (*Brahmasūtra* 1.3.34-38). Daya Krishna questions, “How anyone could, least of all a person who believes and argues for the truth that ‘all this is Brahman’ *sarvam khalvidam Brahman*, and ‘thou art That’ *tat tvam asi*, possibly do that is beyond comprehension and, if taken seriously, would cast serious doubts on the genuineness, authenticity, and honesty of his belief in what he says.” In spite of the ample opportunity provided in these texts themselves for a different interpretation, the followers of both the *Mīmāṃsā* and the *Vedānta* traditions uphold even now the exclusion of the *śūdra* from all that they consider to be the central purpose of human life.

Concluding Remarks

Our critique of *Śruti* owes its inspiration from Richard De Smet who interpreted Śaṅkara as a *Śrutivādin*, establishing his traditional orthodox theologizing based on scriptures. The newness in his perspective induces critical and creative thinking. It is a strange phenomenon when hundreds of minds engage themselves in disputing about what someone else has said. It is seen as a hangover from the past where the authority of the revealed text was so great and the dangers of unorthodoxy so real, that someone gave a real meaning of the text with certain authority. Hangover hypothesis continues to haunt us. ‘Enormous wastage of intellectual effort’ seeking to establish a relationship with the past is exhibited as a ‘sign of a lack of self-confidence in the power of one’s own thinking. To ask a new question is to disrupt the closed circle of accepted knowledge and to open a new vista for thought. Asking questions is crucial for thinking. Questions regarding any text is not what it says but the questions it asks, or rather, the hidden questions that lie behind what is said. The whole exercise of understanding

will take on a new turn and the centre of attention is then on the questions raised and answered sought. We can overcome the theological hangover that has infected so much of cognitive enterprise, and we can get cured of the exegetical disease that results not only in trying to discover the real meaning of the text, but also in claiming that the master said what one considers to be true.

The process of human thinking is an unfinished process, ongoing, without ceasing. The texts are explicitly in the form of a dialogue, are doing exactly what we want them to do, creating an air of open-ended discussion, the questions asked and the replies given. In *Śruti* Upanisads providing an atmosphere of dialogue. The dialogues in the texts provide an interesting take-off point for exploring possibilities of thought. Indian philosophical texts provide a far greater opportunity for such an exercise than most philosophical treatises written in other traditions. The text is to be seen as the thought product of someone’s thinking. The roots of creativity in thinking are unknown and perhaps unknowable in principle. Every human being is capable of entertaining a new thought, of asking a new question, of seeking a new problem. Daya Krishna criticizes the trend of worshipping a guru or a text, a *śruti*, at the expense of the suspension of rational engagement. Śaṅkara himself says that *śruti*’s *prāmāṇya* cannot be conceived if it goes against what is well established by other *pramāṇas*. Richard has shown us that the encounters are ‘experiments,’ of dialogues sorting out the variety of relations of identity and difference that are relevant both within and across cultures.

‘*Sākṣī*’ and ‘*Āptatvam*’ Witness and Trustworthiness in Indian Traditions

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Introduction

Faithfulness to the tradition and transmitting the knowledge to the next generation have been a specific feature of Indian heritage. Either by oral discourses or written documents tradition has been handed over from one to the other generation of adherents of the given convention. A traditional chanting, *slogā* is usually sung before commencing of any discourse in Vedānta. ‘*Sadāśiva samārampām śaṅkarācāraya madyamām asmadācāraya pariyanthām vandē guru paramparām*’ – Homage to the tradition of teachers who transmit the knowledge flowing from the eternal God meditated through great teachers like Śaṅkara.” The chanting in fact enumerates the importance of transmission of knowledge from teacher to the student, elder to the young, learned to the ignorant, through flawless and faithful adherence to the tradition. While highlighting the importance of teaching tradition, *guruparambara*, we are also reminded that almost all philosophical systems of India, except for Carvakas, enthrone ‘testimony,’ *śabda*, as one of the important source of knowledge, *pramāṇa*. The verbal testimony, *śabda* plays a vital role in process of knowledge. Testimony as the means of knowledge is accepted both from the living witnesses, *sākṣis* who have comprehended the truth and from those embedded in the writings of the ‘seers,’ who lived in the past, *ṛṣis*. Both verbal testimony, *vac* of the

*sākṣi*s and written testimony, *śruti*, scriptures of the tradition, are considered as reliable source of knowledge, *pramana*. Śaṅkara Vedānta goes little further to claim that *śabda* and *śruti* are the most reliable. To acclaim *sākṣi*'s testimony as valid *pramana*, insistence is given on the 'trustworthiness' *aptatvam*, of the witness. Nyāya system places greater importance on this aspect of 'trustworthiness' for the reliability of *śabda*. The trustworthy witness is said to be giving an authentic source of knowledge. The paper attempts at the understanding of Indian notions of '*sākṣi*' – witness and '*aptatvam*' – trustworthiness, which could form a basis for a prophetic witnessing in our context.

1. *Sākṣi* - A Seer and A Witness

Etymologically '*sākṣi*' means a witness, a seer, testifier or one endowed with vision. Jayatīrtha defines *sākṣi* as the ultimate criterion of all knowledge and its validation. It is the self-explanatory criterion of truth. *Sākṣi* is none other than *jīva* under its cognitive aspect. It is the innate sense-organ of the self and faculty of direct perception, *svarūpendriya*. The knowledge derived through physical sense organs needs verification because it is liable to defects. *Sākṣi* terminates all tests since it is the final tribunal to establish the validity of knowledge – "*sākṣipratyakṣato hyova mānānām mānateyate*."¹ The knowledge obtained by *sākṣi* can never be sublated, *abādhyā*, - "*sākṣisiddhasya na kvāpi bādyatvaṁ tadadoṣataḥ sarvakāleṣvabādhyatvaṁ sākṣiṇaiva pratīyate*."² The very validation of knowledge depends upon *sākṣi*, which is the ultimate principle that knows the knowledge. *Sākṣi* is the real interpreter of knowledge, *jñānagrāhaka*, and also the guarantor of its validity, *jñānaprāmāṇyagrāhaka*. It is self-luminous, *svaprakāśa*, in its own judgements and self-validating. Madhva quoting *Bāṣkala Sākhā* says, "*sākṣād īkṣate iti sākṣī* - he who sees directly is *sākṣi*."³ More than being a 'knower' intellectually, a *sākṣī* becomes a 'beholder,' 'experiencer' of reality. 'Seeing directly' is to have a glimpse of the truth, to encounter it holistically and to 'experience' the reality, which is generally termed as '*darsana*' in Sanskrit. The authentic experience of truth as 'seeing' enables one to become a 'seer,' *rsi*. Knowledge derived by *saksi*, is surer, certain and valid. Reliability of such knowledge is acclaimed in all traditions. In Vedantic tradition *śruti pramana* – knowledge through means of verbal testimony is hailed as the surest and *śruti/sabda/āgama* as reliable means of knowledge.

1 *Anuvyākhyāna* – 1028, Pandurāṅgi, "Epistemology of Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta," 317.

2 *Anuvyākhyāna* - 402.

3 *Gītābhāṣya* 9.18.

For vedāntin, *āgama/śruti/sabda* is superior among three *pramāṇas*, *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference) and *sabda* (testimony). However, it should not contradict perception or human experience.⁴ The superiority of *pramāṇa* is not only obtained through *apūrvatā*, novelty, but also through *pramāṇāntara virodhābhāva*, absence of any conflict with other *pramāṇas*.⁵ Something is accepted as means of knowledge only when it brings a novelty, newness of knowledge of a thing, which is not obtained by any other means.⁶ *āgama* deals with extra sensory objects or metaphysical matters. Perception with sensory object. Each is supreme, *upajīvyapramāṇam*, in its domain.⁷ If scriptural assertions are confirmed by other *pramāṇas*, it is considered to be the best proof. *sākṣi* is *upajīvyapramāṇa* of scripture.

2. *Sākṣī* - A Witnessing It-self

In vedāntic tradition, a distinction is made between witnessing consciousness and absolute consciousness, witnessing self and absolute self. Brahman is pure consciousness, sometimes as witness-self, *sākṣī*. Sometimes, the Divine, the Absolute, God, Brahman, Īśvara is referred to *sarvasākṣī*, *nityasākṣī*. As absolute consciousness, it is characterless, indeterminate; whereas witnessing consciousness is said to be with experiential content. The question whether they are two different entities or one and the same is well answered by the advaita. The *pratyagātman*, inwardness of the self, makes the self as witnessing to itself. Given the basic tenet of advaita Vedānta, where non-dualism rather than monism is asserted, the identity is not so much asserted as difference annulled. Making both witnessing and absolute consciousness as one and the same. If left only with completely transcendent reality, it is difficult to see how human pilgrimage towards liberation could be possible. Transcendence's on-duality preclude the very possibility of empirical existence. "Reality therefore has to be shown, not

4 "*pratyakṣāde āgamasya prābalyepi na upajīvyapramāṇavirodhe pramāṇyam*." Refer, *Viṣṇutattva vinirṇaya of Madhva*, 18.

5 Ānanadatīrtha, *Viṣṇutattva vinirṇaya* 127.

6 Reasons why many other traditions, do not accept *upamāna*, *arthapathi*, *anupalabdhī* – comparison, postulation and non-cognition, are clear here. Those traditions argue that these three could be part of the other means of knowledge. In this connection, Carvaka's refutation of even Inference and Testimony, too is substantial as they claim that Inference and Testimony are basically founded in Perception. So they too are repeating the knowledge previously obtained by perception. Hence, perception alone is the true source of knowledge, according to the Carvaka.

7 Pandurāṅgi, "Epistemology of Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta," 314.

merely as sheer transcendence, something ‘out there,’ but as complete immanence, as the indwelling essence of everything that appears.”⁸

Advaitins arrive at the notion of a ‘witness-self’ - *sākṣī*, as his attempt to reach the very foundation of knowing. For them it stands behind everything that is known, which is in itself and not in relation to something else, which reveals eternally and without break. It is the ground of the notion of ‘I’ the reality to which the ‘I’ is ascribed. In the experience of the changing and the unchanging experiences, an assertion implies the awareness of that change and this awareness is distinct. To know things to be different we require an identical knower for all the different, which therefore must also be different from the different.⁹ The ‘I’ is a stable vantage-ground from which the fact of flux is itself noted. The ‘I’ is the awareness of that change, which is something distinct, something which is not a part of what it is aware of. In other words it is the stability of which change itself is to be measured.

From the deep sleep state, even this ‘I’ is lost, as ‘I’ is still remains empirical. So, the continuity of ‘I’ has gaps in it, as it resumed on waking state, stating that ‘I was’ asleep, even though while asleep I cannot say ‘I am.’ In waking, it is self-conscious. I am embarrassed. I am aware of myself. In which cases, ‘I’ itself is objectified, looked upon as one more object among other objects. A deeper ‘I’ behind the ‘I’ that is objectified. It is a sort of ‘impartial spectator,’ which is the subject of this awareness. Not the ‘I’ itself since it is already an object of investigation. ‘I’ cannot both be the subject and object at once, since the two functions are irreconcilable, *karma-kartr-virodha*. The ‘I’ and that which is aware of that ‘I’ must be different. Foundational consciousness which illumines, among other things, the ‘I’ itself.¹⁰

3. *Āptatvam*: Reliability or Trustworthiness

Except the Carvaka system, almost all Indian classical philosophical and religious systems accept *Śabda* as one of the valid source of knowledge. *Śabda* is defined as verbal testimony is believed to bring in certitude of knowledge. The valid testimony is to be the testimony of a trustworthy person (*āpta*). A person is trustworthy only if he knows the truth and conveys it correctly. The preconditions for *Śabda* to be a sure source of knowledge are two fold that the person has been a knowledgeable person

8 A. K. Chatterjee, “The Concept of Sākṣī in Advaita Vedānta,” in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. X. No. 2 (Jan-Apr, 1993), 46.

9 “yeṣu vyāvartamāneṣu yad anuvartate tat tebhyo bhinnam, yathā kusumbhyah sūtram.” A. K. Chatterjee, “The Concept of Sākṣī in Advaita Vedānta,” in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. X. No. 2 (Jan-Apr, 1993), 46.

10 A. K. Chatterjee, “The Concept of Sākṣī in Advaita Vedānta,” in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. X. No. 2 (Jan-Apr, 1993), 47-48.

whose sources of knowledge are reliable. His perceptual and inferential knowledge has been without any fault. Secondly, the person is reliable as he is to be known for his authentic and reliable reporting of the knowledge he acquired. These two conditions on both the experiential and expressible aspects of the *apta*, ensures the validity of *Śabda*. In other words, the value of *śabda* depends upon the excellence of its source, i.e., the trustworthiness and competence of the speaker. Mere listening to words or reading is not enough for knowledge of what they signify. All the virtues exposed can be included in *sādhana-catustaya* (which are comprised of *mumukṣutvam* and *śraddha*). The scholarship on Vedic scriptures which is purely of academic interest without believing in the Vedic efficacy for salvation and without practising the necessary virtues might not bring about *brahmānubhava*, without which one cannot be an *āpta*.

One must understand the signifying meaning and this capability is determined according to Naiyayika by God’s will (*īśvara-sankēta*). *Śabda*, testimony is of two kinds; *vaidika* and *laukika*, vedic scriptural and secular. Each of the systems have certain criteria to make sure that their scriptures are valid sources of knowledge and others do not stand up to the test of their criteria. For instance, Buddhist and Jaina traditions would not accept the validity of Vedic, vedantic scriptural authority. The texts of Vēda are all statements of God and therefore their testimony is infallible. Secular words are not so, as they are put to scrutiny. These words are valid only if they are the utterances of trustworthy persons; or else it is not valid. Further, certain traditions have accepted other scriptures as valid.

4. Reliability in Transmission of Traditions

The question, who can speak for *advaita*, can be readily answered as ‘an *āpta* is a reliable or trustworthy person. An *āpta* is a person who is trustworthy. Vatsyāyana while commenting on *Nyāyasūtras*, defines *āpta* as the one who: 1) possesses direct and valid knowledge; 2) intends to communicate his knowledge correctly; and 3) has the ability to communicate his knowledge adequately. A person who is devoid of any of the above characteristics cannot be regarded as *āpta*.¹¹ Even in transmitting a traditional knowledge of a given tradition, *apta* alone is eligible. To answer the question who could be an *āpta*, Śaṅkara’s says, an *āpta* must be 1) *brahmaṇiṣṭhaḥ*, the one who is absorbed in *Brahman*, 2) knower of the scriptures and 3) the one who is mature in moral virtues.¹² For the traditions of Tervada, Mimamsika, Sikhism too we find a similar notions of trustworthy persons alone can reliably transmit the heritage.

11 Cf. *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, s.v. “*Āptatva*.”

12 BG Bh 4.34; Ch U Bh 6.14.2; MU U Bh 1.2.12; Upad 2.1.6; 2.2.45.

Further, for Sankara, “knowledge imparted by those who have full enlightenment becomes effective, not any other.”¹³ In his commentary on Chandogya Upanisad, while mentioning on who can help another for attaining liberation, Śaṅkara states, “The knower of Existence which is *Brahman*, who is free from bondage”¹⁴ is capable of it. According to *Upadeśasāhasrī* a seeker has to approach a knower of *Brahman*, who is established in *Brahman*.¹⁵ Therefore, a *brahmaniṣṭhaḥ*—the one who “remains absorbed in the non-dual *Brahman*,”¹⁶ i.e., the one who has *advaitic* enlightenment—alone is the *āpta* to speak for *advaita* tradition. The enlightened one is supposed to know scriptures. The teacher is characterised as, ‘*śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham*,’ one who is well versed in the meaning of the Vedas that he recites and hears, and who is absorbed in *Brahman*.’¹⁷

5. Reliable Transmitter of Tradition

Who can be the witness to the tradition – an insider or an outsider, is a tricky query to be answered. Every tradition holds that only an insider can rightly speak for the tradition, not the outsider. An insider is usually the one who is born to that tradition, takes up the religious practises of the tradition and believes in its foundational tenets and scriptural authority and efficacy for salvation. Advantage for an insider is that one could go deeper into the experience and expressive with more ease than the outsider who has to take an effort firstly to know and get used to the tradition and its tenets. Even though an outsider can claim authority and authenticity on account of objective knowledge and enlightenment of that tradition, the insider’s understanding is claimed to be rich for the reason that one can penetrate deeper into the tradition with his/her engagement and experience with the tradition having a spontaneous appreciation for and a long-initiated faith in the tradition. If reliability and trustworthiness are based on the experiential and expressional aspects of the teachings of the tradition, anyone who is believed to have obtained it, could be treated as an *apta*.

Actually speaking, both the insider and the outsider could be reliable and can make a tradition enriched and insightful, without considering anyone as superior or inferior. The benefits of objectivity have to be valued

13 (BG Bh 4.34 p. 223).

14 *Chandogya Upanisad Bhashyam*, (Ch Up Bh) 6.14.2, Refer, Swami Gambhirananda, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*. 1983. Reprint (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2015), 487–488.

15 (Upad 2.2.45).

16 (MU U Bh 1.2.12) Refer, Swami Gambhirananda, trans. *Eight Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, Vol. 2. 1957. Reprint (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 104.

17 (MU U Bh 1.2.12, p. 104).

without neglecting the subjective element of the person representing or interpreting the tradition. Possibility of subjective elements is inevitable in any understanding of a tradition. Such influence of subjective element need not be sidelined but one has to pay attention to how it affects one’s understanding or study.¹⁸ Further, analysing this point from Advaitic perspective, Arvind Sharma argues that neither the outsider’s claim for objectivity nor the insider’s claim for subjectivity is absolute from the point of view of *advaitic* epistemology where the knowing subject itself becomes object. The subject-object is understood in *Advaita* as *drk*, the self or what reveals and *drśya*, what is revealed. The knowing subjects are not pure subjects, in as much as one is capable of objectifying oneself in his/her minds. It occurs in the knowledge situation like ‘I know myself’, where ‘myself’ refers to some thought or feeling or some particular perception, etc. Here one objectifies oneself. In the same way insider can also distance his/her own tradition and can know it from its objectivity as the outsider would claim.

In the process of perceptual knowledge ‘mind stuff’ goes out through the senses, assumes the form of the object. Here takes place a communion between the knower and the known. In the same way an outsider while looking at another tradition can lose his/her objectivity and can bring into the interiority of the insider. The earlier polarization of authenticity of insider or that of outsider is reduced by the epistemological consideration; both the insider and outsider can speak for *advaita*.¹⁹ To make the perspective clear Arvind Sharma state,

The great advantage of the outsider is that the outsider can be objective. However, to the extent that an insider from a tradition can objectify his or her own tradition, the insider can also perceptually distance him- or herself from his or her tradition, and, *to that extent*, the outsider’s claim to perceptual objectivity no longer remains unique. Similarly, if the outsider’s mind can reach out and assume the forms of the tradition he or she is studying, *to that extent*, similarly, the insider’s special claim to perceptual interiority in relation to the tradition no longer remains unique.²⁰

18 Given in footnote no.10 of John J Thattamanil, “Managing Multiple Religious Scholarly Identities: An Argument for a Theological Study of Hinduism,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 4 (December 2000), 797.

19 Cf. Arvind Sharma, “Who Speaks for Hinduism? A Perspective from Advaita Vedānta,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 4 (December 2000), 756-757.

20 Cf. Sharma, “Who Speaks for Hinduism?” 758.

For John J Thattamanil and Douglas R. Brooks the objectivity of the scholar and the subjectivity of the religious person are not exclusive.²¹ Douglas R Brooks comments, what is more important is, who one is, when he/she speaks on a tradition. One might be penetrating into it from outside, but more than it, how ‘one is being penetrated by what one have learnt’ is important. “Legitimacy and authenticity are not resolved by being either “outside” or “inside”. Instead what is established is a relationship with our subject that everyone in the conversation understands. Standing “outside” the subject or claiming knowledge by entering into it more personally—these are not exclusive categories of understanding.”

In speaking of general understanding of insider/outsider, one is confronted also with who holds the primacy for truth and is cable of it. Some of the Indian traditions from its socio-economic-religious-political contexts have set the eligibility criteria of caste, gender, territory, culture, nationality, etc. They influence the way of determining the insider/outsider to any tradition. The argument that only those from within the religious or cultural tradition and only the natives of the tradition can become an *āpta* is too much polemic.

In soteriological discourses, every tradition has ‘desire for liberation’ and ‘firm faith’ in the tenets of the tradition, as simple criteria for efforts to become a liberated person. For instance in Advaita, *mumukṣutvam*, and *śraddha* are those included among the cardinal virtues, i.e, *sādhana* *catuṣṭaya*, a *mumukṣu* with firm faith in the salvific efficacy of *śruti*.

In such case, irrespective of genealogy or nationality or culture, one can take up the life orientation for knowledge and experience of God and for transmission of the same to others, whether one is an insider or an outsider.

In contemporary period, especially in India, where many foreign scholars and even native scholars have academically have studied, taught, interpreted and even represented many other traditions to which they originally did not belong to. These academic voices who might be termed as ‘outsiders’ have best witnesses, *saksins*, to the traditions. Authentic desire for knowledge and sincere attempt at propagation and sharing of the same is to be seen as significant effort. Rambachan states that such ‘outsiders’ might bring challenges and critiques from the point of their own tradition and area of expertise, which will keep the given tradition always in the process of being constructively dynamic.²² They may not be the voice as ‘speaking

21 Thattamanil, “Managing Multiple Religious Scholarly Identities, 796; Douglas R. Brooks, “Taking Sides and Opening Doors: Authority and Integrity in the Academy’s Hinduism,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 4 (December 2000), 825–826. Brooks, “Taking Sides and Opening Doors, 818–819.

22 Rambachan, “Rethinking Advaita,” 10.

for’ but significantly their knowledge and objectivity are ‘speaking about’ the tradition. However, William Harman cautions, “the first responsibility of those scholars from outside the tradition who participate in the tradition shall not credibly dictate how that tradition should function. One has to respect the tradition as one find it, not as one wish, one could re-create it.”²³ Such respect does not take away the scholars’ responsibility to critically comment on the inhuman or exploitive structures of the tradition, if there is.²⁴

The reliable transmitter of a tradition whether one is an insider or outsider is the authentic seeker and ‘experiencer’ of truth of the tradition and could definitely be ‘speaking about’ and ‘speaking for’ by both respecting and critiquing the given tradition.

6. Transformative Knowledge and Transferring Knowledge

The study, teaching and interpreting of the scriptures include transformation of the person. The scholarship of the scriptures that ignores the possibility of the transformation of the one who engages with them, is incomplete scholarship yielding no fruit.²⁵ Enlightenment is primary among all virtues which flow as its spontaneous expression. An *apta* integrates moral virtues and his/her scholarship. A witness as a reliable person, *saksi* as an *apta*, is the one who combines intellectual, experiential, moral aspects of reality and life. Only one who experiences reality with both scrutiny of intellect and practice of virtues, will be able stand for truth, witness to the reality and become a reliable, trustworthy and authentic person to transmit values of a tradition to the society. The experience transforms the person and only then his/her desire to transmit the same to the others, becomes justifiable.

7. Intellectual Acumen and Moral Authority

Intellectual calibre is to be with moral virtues. The capacity for good reasoning, Śāṅkara adds, to the need for virtues and purity of mind for a *brahmaniṣṭah*. “(In understanding anything) other auxiliaries (such as reasoning) also function in keeping with the make of a person’s mind.”²⁶ The enlightened teacher is the one who is capable of considering all aspects of an argument and who is endowed with understanding.²⁷ The enlightenment

23 William Harman, “Speaking About Hinduism and Speaking Against It?” *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 68, no. 4 (2000), 739.

24 Harman. “Speaking About Hinduism and Speaking Against It?” 739.

25 Clooney, “From Anxiety to Bliss,” in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon*, 140.

26 (Ch U Bh 8.9.2, p. 636).

27 *Upad* 2.1.6, as in Sengaku Mayeda, ed. and trans. *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śāṅkara* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1979). 212.

(*brahmanubhava*) is to be complimented with intellectual acumen (*vidya*). “The one who has enlightenment but not well-versed in scriptures may not be familiar with the methodology necessary to help the student understand the self as *Brahman*. She may not have the words or skill to use words properly to impart knowledge.”²⁸ But, at the same time, academic and intellectual knowledge without enlightenment will not constitute *āptatvam* (reliability or trustworthiness). “A teacher who is well versed in the scripture, but who has not grasped the immediacy of *Brahman* as her own self and who does not therefore, see herself or others from this understanding, will, at best, impart mere words. Knowledge imparted by such a teacher will be indirect and the self may appear to be a remote entity, difficult to attain.”²⁹ Pure intellectual sharpness alone will not be sufficient for a *sākṣī*. *Āptatvam* is determined by possession of necessary virtues and the consequent purity of mind. “It is well-known that although the word heard may be the same, still its understanding occurs according to the purity or impurity of the hearer’s mind.”³⁰

8. Role of *Sākṣī* in Liberation

The Indian tradition has always given a prominent place to a preceptor in the acquisition of knowledge. The Upaniṣads teach, “He knows who owns a preceptor.” (*Chāndogya* 6.14.2); “One should approach a preceptor to know Him.” (*Muṇḍaka* 3.12.12). The preceptor is the experiencer and the witness to the truth. Such a person becomes a reliable one for imparting knowledge. The Guru is the preceptor, the experience, the witness who can liberate the ignorant, by dispelling the darkness from within. Vedic-Vedāntic traditions hold that *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididyāsana*, (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5) as the means to obtain adequate knowledge of God. *Śravaṇa* is the study of scriptures which have as their subject-matter the supreme God and his perfect qualities.

For Mādhva, *śravaṇa* does not mean self-study or reading scriptures by oneself, but the aspirants study under a proper preceptor.³¹ Both the pupil’s efforts and preceptor’s graceful instruction are essential. But more powerful

28 Rambachan, *The Advaita World View*, 63.

The enlightened is the authority for *advaita*. In his/her mission to lead others to this enlightenment his/her ability to impart the knowledge is significant.

29 Rambachan, *The Advaita World View*, 63.

30 (Ch U Bh 8.9.2, p. 636). The virtues suggested in the passages such as MU U Bh 1.2.12; Upad 2.1.6; Ch U Bh 6.14.2, shows the significance of compassion.

31 D. N. Shanbhag, “Bondage and Liberation of the Jīva,” in *Theistic Vedānta*, ed., R. Balasubramanian, Vol II. Part 3 of *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2003), 436.

and fruitful is preceptor’s grace and instruction (*Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* of Mādhava 3.3.45).

In Vīraśaivism, Guru, spiritual teacher is the liberated person, is supposed to be well-versed in spiritual matters. In compassion he offers the aspirant the instruction on the secrets of spiritual discipline. Guru as a liberated person, knows better.³² Guru plays a dominant role not only in the seeker’s spiritual life, but also in the society. As Basavaṇṇa says, “In making a pot the clay comes first... in knowing Śiva’s path the guru’s path comes first...”³³ For this reason guru enjoys a very high respect in the society. In both Tamil Śaivism and Vīra-Śaivism Guru is viewed as incarnation of Para-Śiva. Chennabasavaṇṇa says, “Hara in order to show his form condescended in the form of guru...”³⁴ Again Uṛiṅga Peddi says, “Śiva, assuming a human body, became a guru and descended to the mortal world in order to compassionately initiate the disciples.”³⁵

Concluding Remarks

For obtaining valid and certitude of knowledge, Indian tradition holds on to maximum six ways of knowing, among which Testimony, *śabda* is hailed as the greatest. For accepting the knowledge through a *sākṣī*, a witness, a condition of *āptatvam* is placed. A witness is an experiencer and a seer of the truth and one is reliable and trustworthy to transmit the knowledge one acquired from the tradition. The witnesses with reliability become a propellant for growth in the society. Today we are in need for such *sākṣīs* with *āptatvam*.

Violence in the name of religion, caste, race and language happen in contemporary world of ours. The motive and justification for such inhuman acts are that those belonging to a particular tradition take pride in their affiliation and try to demonstrate it as a ‘witnessing’ to their association with certain ideology, custom and ‘notion of truth.’ Wrong understanding of ‘witnessing’ leads them to do so.³⁶ In India today, religious politics have

32 N. G. Mahadevappa, “Vīra-śaivism,” in *Theistic Vedānta*, ed., R. Balasubramanian, Vol II. Part 3 of *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2003), 744.

33 Armando Menezes and S. M. Angadi, trans. *Vacanas of Basavaṇṇa* (Sirigere: 1967), verse. 70.

34 B. V. Mallapur, ed., *Gennabasavaṇṇanavara vacanasamputa (Kanada)* (Bangalore: Govt of Karnataka, 1993), v. 22.

35 M. M. Kalburgi, ed., *Saṅkīrṇa vacanasamputa – 1 (Kanada)* (Bangalore: Govt of Karnataka, 1993), v. 1558.

36 Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, “Victims Always”, in *Frontline* Vol. 26 (21 Nov – 4 Dec., 2009), 4. A 21-year-old Dalit man was beaten to death allegedly by a group of men belonging to the upper caste Patel community for attending a garbaevent in Gujarat’s

dampened the real spirit of witnessing. Commercialization of spirituality has led to degradation of high ideals of religious virtues to be practiced and propagated. Those who claim to represent the religious and knowledge traditions, have failed to have firsthand experience of the basic tenets of the traditions, which a preceptor, *sākṣi*, is supposed to have. The pseudo *sanyasis*, fake *fakirs*, professional *guru*, enchanting *ācāryas*, mesmerizing *swamijis*, lack such comprehension of truth and authentic experience of 'seeing' *darśana*, which a *sākṣi* is expected to have. Without *aptatvam*, trustworthiness in their true path of knowledge these false prophets witness to non-truth or distortion of truth taught in the given tradition. Non-recognition of *aptatvam* of the master, by the followers often breeds irrational beliefs and superstitious practices. Breach of trust and manipulation of confidence are for all to witness in such blind following of bogus *Babas*.³⁷

While false witnessing in religious and social contexts, draws attraction of many, we are also disturbed by the fact of lack of recognition of true witnessing of truth. Silencing of true witnesses, *sākṣīs*, has a long historical records in society. It remains only as an ideal to be a witness. Practically speaking there is less recognition due to such ideal. Truthful and worthwhile leaders and teachers are scorned, fooled at and even driven out right away from the mainstream life of the society, labelling them as 'insane,' 'unrealistic' and 'impractical.' Hypocrisy is evident in the harsh treatment of truthful teachers while living and in praising them as ideals of life, after they have gone. The stark reality of pretense shows itself in idolizing the ideals of *sākṣi* and in rejecting them as unrealistic. Despite the dichotomy, prophetic witnesses continue to bear witness to the truth.

Anand district. "Dalit man 21 beaten to death allegedly," <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/dalit-man-21-beaten-to-death-allegedly-for-attending-garba-in-gujarat-1757498>. (accessed on November 15, 2017). Central African Republic Hundreds of civilians are seeking refuge inside a mosque in the Central African Republic's border town of Bangassou amid ongoing attacks by Christian militias that have killed up to 30 civilians. "Christian Militants Killing Muslims," <http://religionnews.com/2017/05/14/christian-militias-kill-up-to-30-muslim-civilians-in-central-african-republican>. (accessed on November 15, 2017). "ISIS Killed 29 Christians," <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/may/terrorists-kill-26-christians-bus-egypt-monastery-minya.html>. (accessed on November 15, 2017).

37 The Dera sect chief Ram Rahim Sing was considered as a father by his followers. Victims were under emotional and physical custody of Dera chief and he broke their trust and misused his position as a religious and spiritual leader. "Godman -Abuses," <http://www.news18.com/news/india/rape-victims-move-hc-see-life-imprisonment-for-dera-sacha-sauda-chief-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-1536095.html>. (accessed on November 15, 2017).

The goodness of a preceptor becomes an example of various other works of goodness. Tiruvalluvar asserts it that only refined behaviour of the master leads the society with all other good things.³⁸ Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* also asserts the following to Arjuna, "whatever action the leader performs, common men follow; and whatever standards the leader sets by exemplary acts, all worlds pursue."³⁹ In political context of our times, the lack of leadership with vision and experience leads to stunted growth and conflicts.⁴⁰ The present ills in India are due to these agencies which have become corrupted and also corrupting the people. Corruption prevails due to lack of sincere and trustworthy persons as witness to life of authenticity and truthfulness. Corruption-less society is possible only with men of integrity who can achieve great things by conforming to ethics.

38 Gowri Mariswari, *Tirukkural*, 202. "*Gunanalam cāndroar nalanay piranalam yennalathu vullathoom andru.*"

39 *The Bhagavad Gita* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2009), 53.

40 R. Prasanna, "Dragon's Frostbite", in *The Week* Vol. 31 (26 – 4 May, and June, 2013), 37.

God as Guru in Śaiva Siddhānta An Indian Christian Reading

Fr. Milton, MMI

Introduction

Liberation is the ultimate goal of all human endeavours. Humans strive to attain it. As a religious philosophical system, Śaiva *Siddhānta* has a holistic approach towards human bondage and liberation. Being a pluralistic realism it upholds triple realities of God (*Pati*), Soul (*Paśu*) and World (*Pāśam*) as real and eternal. Souls are said to be bound by triple impurities, *mala*, namely *ānava*, *karma* and *māyā*. Śaiva *Siddhānta* gives a profound philosophy of liberation by stating various means of liberation. Liberation is never attained by human efforts alone. Role of a guru is emphasized in soul's journey to final liberation. It is God who chooses his disciples and bestows his grace as divine knowledge or wisdom in the form of guru. God as *Pati* in Śaiva *Siddhānta*, lifts the soul from the sea of misery to the seat of abiding bliss. The soul, *Pasu* is said to be bound by triple impurities-*malas*, namely *ānavamala*, *karmamala* and *māyāmala*. Liberation as communion with God, the Absolute is presented as Guru and the supreme liberator. According to Śaiva *Siddhānta*, the four means of attaining salvation are *Sariya*, *Kriyā*, *Yoga* and *Jñāna*. This is the *Jñāna* imparted by the grace of God through Guru who plays an important role in the enlightenment of soul. The soul gains freedom from bondage and achieves communion with God.

1. Pati, Pasu and Pasam: Interconnected Triple Realities

In *Śaiva Siddhānta*, God, soul and matter are the three eternal substances namely, *Pati*, *Paśu* and *Pāśam* that constitute reality. *Pati* or God, *Paśu* or Soul, and *Pāśam* or Bonds, all three are said to be eternal, beginningless. *Pāśam* would not approach *Pati* by its own effort, as it is inert and unintelligent. *Paśu* too is not able to reach up to God due to bondage. Yet, with his grace God nears the soul to relieve it from the power of bondage and make it surrender totally to God. *Śaiva Siddhānta* exhibits lofty comprehensive understanding of God, larger scope of spiritual progress and the utility of furthering a cause of material body and the world. As a pluralistic realism it maintains that God, soul and matter constitute reality. The pluralist vision of reality, however, upholds not ‘non-connected,’ ‘separated’ or not even juxtaposed entities. All the three are necessarily interconnected, mutually interrelated and essentially interactive. Even explanation of the nature of each one is intricate and involved, due to their intertwined and interdependent character of these concepts and the knowledge about them. Whether in state of bondage or liberation, they are interrelated very closely, or even inseparably.¹ Interrelationship is further explained in the following way, as Joseph Jaswant Raj puts it, “...the Supreme One is the concerned Lord; spirits-in-bondage... is His central concern in the unfolding of history; and the beautiful world is the setting His concern provides, to lead the estranged man to liberation from bondage, and to communion with Him in Bliss (*mukti*).”²

According to *Śaiva Siddhānta*, *cit* and *sat* are the most fundamental qualities of *Pati* and other qualities of *Pati* are derivable from these two qualities. The knowledge of *Pati* to be from ours and that must reflect naturally the essential characteristics of *Pati*. *Pati* is understandable only to those who follow the path of *Śaiva Siddhānta* and thereby have the eye of divine grace. *Pati* remains unaffected, because he performs the actions in absolute freedom. *Pati* is transcendent to the categories of cause and effect. Since *Pati* is transcendent to both the *Paśu* and the *Pāśam*, He cannot be known by critical reasoning.³ Therefore, *Pati* is known as Absolute or Supreme Lord. God evinces great love in creating souls and opening up the source of experience. God is the source of all love. Out of infinite love for us He created this world, and by that love we may know true bliss. He

1 Joseph Jaswant Raj, *Grace in the Saiva Siddhantham and in St. Paul* (Madras: South Indian Salesian Society, 1989), 57.

2 *Ibid.*, 59.

3 V. S. George Joseph, *Centrality of Self in Śaiva Siddhānta* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006), 120-121.

contains Himself in the love of our tiny heart. *Śaiva Siddhānta* admits that God is a person, but maintain at the same time that His personality is not conditioned by any factor and that it is constituted by its own freedom. It holds that God performs cosmic functions, but maintains at the same time, that in performing. He is formless, with form and both. It implies that the kind of form He assumes as required by His function is a case of freely assuming personality. It is this freedom to assume any and every form and no form that stands out as the differential in the definition of the nature of *Pati*. We have to note here that this is not the case with souls. Souls are given forms by *Pati* in accordance with their karma. The karmic necessity is not to be found in *Pati*, who comes to help the souls out of His Grace. Thus it is said that when He performs the five-fold activities, *Pati* is free to take any and every form that is required for the purpose.

2. The Five-Fold Functions of God

The central theme of the doctrine of five-fold cosmic functions of God is the continuity and congruence between the creative and destructive processes at work within phenomenal life, and also the great continuity between phenomenal life considered as one long enjoyment and a life of spirit involving transcending of phenomena (*moksa*).⁴ All cosmic functions, manifest simultaneously with the pulse of every moment, and in sequence through the change of time are essentially expressions and embodiments of grace. The meaning of each of these functions, not only the fifth one which is grace can become intelligible if looked at as an expression of divine grace. The prime Lord who was denoted the Lord of dissolution of the universe is in union with the selves, as the self is in the physical body; he is different from them even as the sun's light is from the eyesight.⁵ Having this relationship with the souls, He wills them to undergo death and birth, experiencing the results of their works which fructify by the action of the consciousness-force which is known as his authority. This authority is in implicit union with him, the union of substance and quality. God's consciousness-force is the instrumental cause of the universe and the works of the souls are also instrumental through and depending on it. The five-fold functions are creation, protection, destruction, obscuration and the act of grace. The creation and destruction are the manifestation and the disappearance of the universe. Protection is the abiding of the universe from the time of its manifestation till its disappearance. Obscuration is to be understood as the

4 K. Sivaraman, *Saivism in Philosophical Perspective*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 133.

5 Joseph, *Centrality of Self of Saiva Siddhanta*, 125.

state of bondage, and the act of grace is the grant of the state of release. All the five kinds of actions performed by God are expressions of divine grace, though grace is stated as the last and one among the five-fold actions. The bestowal of grace is called 'Anugraha Śakti,' because when the powers of ānava are fit enough to be overcome, God appears directly in the form of the spiritual preceptor (guru) and grants release to the soul.

3. Role of Guru

"The Guru comes, purifies and grants Godhood, They see this not, The witless ones of vision faulty; But the holy ones take to him In endearment as unto kith and kin, And worship him as Lord Himself" (*Tirumantiram* - 1578). In *Śaiva Siddhānta* the word 'Guru' means the one who removes the bondage and imparts divine knowledge to his disciple. In *Śaiva Siddhānta* guru plays an important role in the enlightenment of soul. If one who feels thirsty drinks sea water his thirst will not be fulfilled. Otherwise the same sea water evaporates, reaches the clouds and rains that rain water will remove his thirst, in the same way one who reads *stotras* and *sastras* by him cannot attain divine knowledge. If he listens to the preaching's of holy guru who has the storage of divine knowledge his thirst for wisdom will be satisfied. Through purification, the guru grants Godhood. The witless realize this not, while the holy ones receive this knowledge with deep gratitude. Only through the guru's blessing can one experience the false dissolving in the true, learn the omnipotence of truth, possess the bountiful grace of God and realize the miraculous powers. To get divine knowledge two conditions are necessary: 1. The soul should get matured. 2. There is need for holy guru.

According to the *Śaiva Siddhānta* doctrine, the manifestations of grace in the form of guru can take place only when the soul has reached a certain stage of maturity.⁶ This stage first and foremost, consists in a state of balance of the deeds. When it takes place, then there is the onset of grace and the appearance of guru. God can appear as guru to dispel the dark-impurity which is the cause of the ignorance of the soul.⁷ Is it possible that a learned person can become a guru to teach the embodied soul the ways and the means of overcoming its bondage? However a learned person may be on this world he cannot become an efficient spiritual guide; God alone can appear as Guru. *Jñāna* can arise; without the divine guru if the pure sun stone can emit fire. Without the sun this reveals that one cannot attain divine knowledge without the help of holy guru. Lord Śiva discerns as guru due to the tapas (*sariya*,

6 J. M. Nallaswami Pillai, *Studies in Saiva Siddhanta* (Madras: Meikandan Press, 1911), 200.

7 S. Arulsamy, *Saivism: A Perspective of Grace* (Bangalore: Sterling Publishers, 1987), 95.

Kriyā and *yoga*) done by the soul. So everybody should worship guru as God. Here worship does not mean the physical action alone. It means we should follow his preaching and stand in *arul vali nirral*. Hence, none but God can become a spiritual guide of the embodied souls.

4. Purpose of Guru and His Importance

The purpose of having a guru is to cure the self of its intrinsic malady of ignorance. It is true that the light of divine grace is inimical to dark-impurity; but as it is a spiritual reality, the self does not so easily recognize it when it shines. Hence there is a need for the same inner-light in the concrete form of guru, becomes even more efficacious to dispel the delusion by granting it the highest wisdom.⁸ This truth has been illustrated beautifully in the following analogy: When there is a snake-bite, and poison has entered the human body, the presence of the mongoose alone, however inimical it might be to the snake, will not do to remove the poison. A skilful physician is necessary. So also the dark-impurity will disappear only under the penetrating gaze look of the guru. To sum up, the reason why Pati takes bodily form is: to liberate the soul from its state of bondage, to impart true knowledge and to place the soul in eternal bliss. God enlightens the soul by means of grace by imparting true knowledge and removes the ever increasing impurities. If God assumes the form of a guru and grants this grace (*arul*), then the soul can get true enlightenment and knowledge which, in turn, will grant it liberation. Thus when the soul is fit for higher knowledge, this grace should manifest itself in the form of a guru and lead it to liberation and bliss.

According to *Śaiva Siddhānta*, the austere practices of *sariya*, *Kriyā* and *yoga* by themselves will not produce *Jñāna*, but will only produce the condition for the appearance of the guru, who will impart divine wisdom to the self. The *Jñāna* imparted to the self is a realization of a state of being and not an intellectual understanding. It is impossible for the self to attain *Jñāna* without God himself appearing as guru and imparting it to the self. God comes to the self only through the realized ones but only when the self is ready to receive the grace. The necessity of a guru is insisted on again. The need of a guru as the one who knows the ways of attaining beatitude, as the revealer of the wide extended way and as the great knower who will guide one along the way. God transcends all these limitations, he alone can show this way, and so he has to necessarily appear as a guru. Even when God appears in human form he does not assume the body of *māyā* and hence he is not subject to the above limitations. It is impossible for the self to attain *Jñāna* without God himself appearing as guru and imparting it to

8 Arulsamy, *Saivism*, 96.

the self, the *Siddhānta* tradition holds the guru's role as essential as that of God himself. The guru has an important role to play in the self-realization of the selves here on this earth. It is he who initiates the self into his process of liberation.

5. Recognition of Guru

The grace of the Lord takes on human form so that the souls can approach Him with ease and see and touch Him. But, unfortunately, not everyone recognizes this gracious guru. The things of this world are ever-changing ones, not real; they are unintelligent; the souls are enduring ones and therefore not ever changing ones, and they are also intelligent. However, their knowledge is not the true one. Whereas the understanding through grace is the true knowledge and its form of guru is real. The manifestation of grace in the form of guru is not the same for all. Grace assumes forms according to the need of each and every individual self and so it may not be the same for everyone.⁹ Hence one should not ask why someone does not recognize the form of grace that is meant for others. So depending on the specific needs, each self can see and experience the form of grace accordingly. The experience of this form of grace by one self cannot be the same as that of another self. Even though the God appears in human form, not all embodied souls recognize him. For most of them he is just another ordinary human being. His work in the visible form of a guru is not recognized as God by the souls who are not mature enough to see Him thus, except as a man among men.¹⁰ Only the mature souls can recognize God in human guru.

6. Pati's Appearance as Guru

There are three modes in which *Pati* appear as guru. The operation of grace depends on how weak or strong the selves are in the progress of their spiritual life. The guru appears on the scene now to bestow grace. The *Siddhāntin* says that the guru appears in a human form to the selves with three impurities.¹¹ It is like setting a deer in order to catch another deer, the lord, in his grace, appears in a human form to human beings so as not to overwhelm them by his transcendent majesty. The human beings, however, are not to make the mistake of reducing the guru to their own level. They should worship the guru as the lord himself, because he is really the lord. To the selves with *ānava* and *karma*, the lord takes the divine form and appears to them. They

9 Arulsamy, *Saivism*, 101.

10 Navaratnam, "The Light on the Path of the Soul in *Saiva Siddhanta*," 213.

11 Joseph, *Centrality of Self in Saiva Siddhanta*, 165.

are, in a way better placed in understanding the lord in the divine form than the selves with all the three *malas*. To the selves with *anava* alone, he does not appear in an external form. He illumines their understanding and inspires them by abiding in them. In other words, selves in an advance stage of spiritual evolution do not require the guru in an external form. They feel his presence in themselves and respond to his grace. For the *sakalas*, *Pati* will appear in a human form; for the *Pralayākalas*, he will appear in a divine form; and for the *Vijñānakalas*, he will appear in his own essential form. So far as the human beings are concerned, God as guru will appear to them in a human form, which is known as *sadhara*.

The question may arise, how *Pati* could appear in a human form? It is possible because he is transcendent by his substance and yet he is one with the self and the world. When actuated by *Pati*'s grace, the human form will assume the form of grace and therefore, there is no difficulty in maintaining that *Pati* will appear in the human form. Self knows by participating in the other. Therefore, it is necessary that *Pati* appears as *Vijñānakala* and reveals, so that self can attain liberation. But how can the self, who is already in the grip of *Pāśam*, be instructed by guru? For this the *Siddhāntin* replies that the guru appears only when the self has already learnt to discriminate between its essential and accidental qualities and when the guru imparts divine grace the self receives it. The guru thus manifests the inherent and essential Śivatya of the self. The self will attain the feet of the lord, who is the ground of the self. It will attain Śivatva without any effort on its part. Just as the man seated in a swing will fall to the ground when the rope of the swing is cut off, the self will gravitate towards God without any effort on its part, when it is instructed about its essential nature by the guru.¹² Gods revelation precedes man's reception of it.

The soul gains by worshipping guru that they get freedom from bondage, they realize the true nature of soul, they stand in *arul vali nirral* and they come together with god. Again the question arises how they get freedom from bondage. The answer is that the guru removes the bondage of his disciple by giving *diksha*. What does *diksha* mean? The term *diksha* means removal of ignorance and impart of divine knowledge. As the ripening mala varies for, different souls, the purificatory rites performed by guru are also of various kinds. They are: *Nayana diksha*: The guru removes the *Pāśam* of the student through his gracious eyes in the same way as the first hatch their eggs. *Sparsa diksha*: The guru removes the disciple's bondage through his gracious touch in the same way as hen hatches their eggs. *Manasa diksha*: The guru removes the disciple's bondage by means of

12 *Ibid.*, 167.

touching in the same way as the tortoise hatches their eggs. *Vacaka diksha*: The guru removes the disciple's bondage by teaching him the real meaning of the five sacred letters. *Sastra diksha*: The guru teaches the nature of three realities. *Yoga diksha*: It is teaching the disciples to practice *airadara Śiva yoga*. *Hautri diksha*: It is unique and possesses all other *dikshas* as its parts. It is of two kinds namely *gnavati* and *Kriyāvati*. The first is the performance of the rites mentally. The second is actually getting the things required and performing the rites. These seven are the classifications based on the way of performing *diksha* by guru to his disciples. *Hautri diksha* is four fold namely *samāyā*, *visesha*, *nirvana* and *abisheks*. *Samāyā diksha* is initiating a person into the *Śaiva Siddhānta* religion. *Visesha diksha* is making the initiated person to do *Śiva pooja*, *nirvana diksha* is completely removing the bondage and helping the soul to reach God. *Abhiseka diksha* helps a person to become eligible to be a guru who can give *diksha* to other disciples and is fit to do *pooja* in the temples. These four *dikshas* are given to the devotees depending on their mental maturation. The Siddhāntins consider *diksha* as very important in spiritual life. The great guru performs *diksha* for souls. This may be done by thought (*manasa*), by word of mouth, by laying on of hands and by look. The touch of a guru imparts spiritual vibration and illumination. The word of a guru makes the supreme truth to be alive and vibrant to the aspirant. The look of a guru has a transforming effect. Though the Siddhāntin lays stress on *Jñāna* as the indispensable means of release, he insists on the performance of *diksha* because he considers the removal of mala by *diksha* as a necessary preliminary before the latent Śivatva of selves can be manifested by *Jñāna*.

The holy guru is *Pati* Himself. He granted his grace and taught meekness. *Pati* revealed the real, the unreal and the real/unreal to Tirumular. Immense is the power of the presence of the divine guru that liberated the souls from the bondage. The guru grants the miraculous powers and mystic powers of the hidden *yoga* through conferment of his grace. The *Śiva guru*—the pure being—is above all the worlds, bestowing grace and liberating souls from their bondage. Truly, inexplicable is his glory. The holy guru is a full of compassion, snaps the fetters of *Paśu-Pāśam*, and makes me savor the nectar of liberation. God manifests Himself to the souls as a human guru. God uses the human shape of guru as a decoy in the same way that hunters use tame deer in order to draw other deer within the range of vision.

God manifests Himself as a human guru as soon as the ripened soul is ready for the reception of *Jñāna*. The characteristic of this state is that all the desires of this phenomenal world appear to the ripened soul as vomit. Even as one does not desire to eat that which is regurgitated, so the ripened

soul will have no desire for the things of this material world.¹³ The stage of maturity for *sakala* souls consists of three parts. The first is *iru-vinai-oppu* or the state in which the soul takes an attitude of perfect equanimity towards meritorious and sinful deeds. This is the state in which the soul reacts to fortune and misfortune, sadness and gladness in the same way. The second stage of maturity is called *malaparipākam*, or the stage in which the three *malas* meet with the cause of their removal. In other words, it is the state of neutralization made possible by the fact that desire is gone. The third stage is śaktinipāta or the setting of divine grace upon the soul that is ripe. This is otherwise called the imprint of God's *Jñāna*. The means by which it comes is the manifestation of God as a human guru.

Iruvinaioppu and *Malaparipākam* make it possible for the soul to break free from mala; and by Śaktinipāta it can then be linked to *Pati* alone. Still these two changes need to actually take place; which can only happen if the soul has fully grasped the true nature of mala and of the highest good. *Sariya*, *Kriyā* and *yoga* will have given some inklings of the true nature of all that is; the soul's entry into *iruvinaiooppu* is evidence for this. But inklings are not actual true knowledge. The soul yearns to leave the world for Śiva; yearns, but does not leave. Knowing that Śiva provides good through śaktinipāta his own śakti, the only effective help for achieving that good. But the soul does not know how to use that help, or where to search for Śiva, or how to recognize him. What a hopeless search so Śiva must take the soul on further, helping it to find him and recognize him. He is of course there in the soul, but that presence and company is no help, for the soul can no more recognize him than we can see the shadows which must be there in water, as air is there. Śiva must reveal himself to souls in a form they can recognize, as he does when he appears to them in the form of a guru.

By nature, Śiva is invisible. He accordingly works in secret, not appearing himself. Appearing in the visible form of a guru is complete novelty, unlike his usual way of doing things, though not actually contradicting it. For in that visible form he performs an invisible work, since souls not yet ripe enough to see him may look on him physically but still do not recognize him as Śiva. For the world Śiva even in the visible form of a guru remains the invisible God, performing an invisible task. Śiva appears in disguise for the sake of the souls he has come to help. Were he to appear in his undisguised sovereignty, they would be flee from him in

13 John H. Piet, *A Logical Presentation of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1952), 130.

terror.¹⁴ This does not apply to *Vijñānakalar* souls, so he appears to them without disguise. More can also be expected *Pralayākalar* souls, who take up the place of gods in the universe, so he does not appear to them in human form, but as God. But to *sakalar* souls he appears as a man, so as not scare them. In this case the guru-form serves as a sort of bait.

Souls not yet in *iruvinaiooppu* will not recognize Śiva in his disguise as a guru, even if their eyes see him, for their eyes are not fit to make out the divine. Nor will they understand his teaching, even though their ears do hear it, for their reason is not capable of grasping the divine. What they see is only the body. They do not see the *arul-śakti* hidden in the body. What they hear are mere words, without grasping the truth they contain. They have eyed and see not, ears and they do not hear. For them the form of the God-guru is an ordinary human form, and his words the words of an ordinary man. The soul is able by its organs to recognize certain objects, but it still needs a divine guru. The knowledge transmitted through the organs is unreliable, for the senses do not show things as they really are, but only as they appear to those organs. For the soul to form an accurate opinion of things as they really are, it must stop looking at them through the spectacles of the senses, which tend to make them look different. Instead, it must give up using the senses to discover things with. Not that this is a relapse, into the *kevala* state, for the power of *mala* over that particular soul is broken and it now has a much better and reliable organ of understanding, that is Śiva's śakti. The objects being studied must evade the five senses, in reaching this new organ; though this does not require those senses to be destroyed. Śiva is now the only means of knowledge, as all else is a sat or is influenced by it. So for the soul to come to a perfect and unclouded knowledge, it is absolutely necessary that *Pati* appear.

7. Instruction by the Guru

Guru teaches first about the eternal substances, *Pati*, *Paśu*, *Pāśam*; though it is not much good just knowing that they exist. Then he teaches the pupil how these entities relate to the soul. Once this is realized, the soul knows its history and its fate. Knowing its history precisely, the soul sees that progress is possible, that a better fate can be had by avoiding the lapses and errors previously committed and now seen for what they are. *Pati* has the pupil confront his own history by explaining the law of *karma*, and how it operates. This knowledge restrains the soul from committing deeds fateful by their consequences. Ānavamala made souls ignorant of the *karmic* law

14 Schomerus H. W. *Śaiva Siddhānta: An Indian School of Mystical Thought*, Trans. Mary Law, Humphrey Palmer, ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000), 271.

and thus brought them under its sway; so true knowledge of this law is the only thing that will get them to abstain from action altogether. If a *Siddhāntin* says my action is God's his meaning differs from what a *sankaran vedantist* would mean by the same words. The *vedantist* says it because he holds that he is identical with god. The *Siddhāntins* say it because they believe that God gave him his soul, and guides and inspires him. The soul stands as agent, so long as it is dominated by *ānavamala*. Only after *ānavamala* is removed is the action ascribed to *Pati*, as by the practices of *iruvinaiooppu*, *malaparipākam* and *śaktinipāta* the soul's activity is, so to speak, ascribed to a new subject, a soul no longer governed by *ānavamala*, but by the śakti of *Pati*.

The guru shows how to go about abandoning self-activity and letting *Pati*'s work unhindered. He first says how not to get there. It is futile to seek true knowledge and right dealing by knowledge which came through organs and senses, for they are products of *māyā*, and therefore material in character.¹⁵ The soul is like a photographic plate. To get a clear picture, only those rays of light coming from the object photographed should fall on it. Everything else must be excluded. If other light gets into the camera, the plate shows a complete muddle, unrecognizable, impossible to sort out. So it is with the soul. If anything and everything is allowed to work on it, no clear knowledge can result. But if the soul is shut away carefully from all external things, and directed only on the grace of *Pati*, then *Pati* becomes both subject and object of knowledge, of action, and of the satisfaction that the soul will feel.

Only with the grace of the holy guru come true instruction, enlightenment, and liberation. They who have reached his holy feet are superior to earthly monarchs. These at best can but sway the world; but the joy of devotees is boundless indeed. *Pati* does not appear to all souls in the same manner. To the *Vijñānakalar* he appears in the first person; to the *Pralayākalar*, in the second person; and to *sakalar* souls in the third person. *Pati* considers the special needs of individual souls, as we can see in his way of teaching them right knowledge. The guru's way of teaching is not a mere flash of enlightenment, but a gradual, progressive development.

Concluding Remarks

Śaiva Siddhānta concept of Guruship of God as a means to human liberation has specific implications for contemporary liberation movements. Gracious God who creates the body and world for the souls to be liberated, instructs and guides them as a Guru to liberation. Besides the human effort towards

15 Schomerus, *Saiva Siddhanta*, 280.

liberation, God by his gracious intervenes in human life as a guru and leads the souls to liberation. Liberation is the ultimate goal of all human endeavours. Humans strive to attain it. Almost all Indian philosophical systems speak of it as their final purport. Each system with one's own unique metaphysics and epistemology put forth theories and means to show humans how to attain. Even though the very concept of liberation itself may vary, each system has liberation as a *parama puruṣārtha*, Supreme goal of human. As a religious philosophical system, Śaiva Siddhānta system has a holistic approach towards human bondage and liberation. Liberation is never attained by human efforts alone. Role of a guru is emphasized in soul's journey to final liberation. God's grace is manifested in the form of a guru. Guruship of God in human liberation has tremendous implications for contemporary world.

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