

To be is to be seen: The doctrine of Drstisrsti in Advaita Vedanta

Can the object unrevealed by Consciousness ever exist?

It seems plausible that it does, since at the moment of revelation what was unrevealed becomes revealed; what was unknown becomes manifest through knowledge. So, the strongest conviction we carry with us is that the object exists as such prior to its perception.

But a group of thinkers contends to prove just the opposite. 'To be is to be perceived' is the essence of subjective idealism initiated by Berkeley in western philosophy. In India, the Buddhists belonging to the Vijnanavada school also repudiate the independent existence of the object apart from its knowledge. According to them, the objects are nothing but modification of Vijnana (mind). So, nothing exists as substance independent of ideas. The idealists try to consistently explain the epistemic world order through coherence rather than through correspondence.

The Advaita doctrine of Drstisrsti seems close to the above mentioned philosophies. It is explained clearly by Appaya Diksita in his Siddhantalesa and logically defended and expounded by Madhusudana Sarasvati in his Siddhantabindu and Advaita Siddhi as a partial Advaita view. According to this, the objects cannot exist unknown, independent of consciousness. The objects exist till they are perceived. The upholders of this view, unlike the mainstream Advaitins do not accept the functional reality (vyavaharika satta) of the objects. For them, all the so called empirical objects are not different from dream experiences. Appaya gives two meanings of this word. First, the 'being' exists so far as it is seen. The second, 'seeing' is itself 'being'. In Advaita Siddhi, various alternative meanings are discussed. Madhusudana equates this doctrine with Ekajivavada. It may be noted that Drstisrsti is the epistemological outcome of Ekajivavada which is its ontological foundation.

However, the main feature of this theory is that the object cannot exist apart from its perception.

It is to be noted that the unknown existence of the object totally independent of the perceiver is quite a taxing problem in philosophy. Though the commonsense knowledge that the object exists prior to its perception is the foundation of all functional human knowledge including his scientific understanding of the nature of the things, it is an epistemologically insoluble problem. The abyss between a totally unknown existence and a known reality can never be bridged in our epistemic framework. In other words, we can never relate a known reality with a condition totally unknown and unknowable. The Noumena can be a philosophical fiction but it

can never be a reality. The result is either a cruel agnosticism or a hard pressed idealism.

However, Drstisrsti is neither of these two. Advaita Vedanta advocates Anirvacaniya Khyati against the subjective idealism of the Buddhist Vijnanavadins upholding the doctrine of atmakhyati. According to Advaita Vedanta, the erroneous object such as rope-serpent is not a mental modification, but the appearance (vivarta) of avidya. Whether it is the mainstream Advaita which holds three strata of reality and the existence of object prior to its perception or it is the partial view of Advaita known as Drstisrsti which advocates only two strata of reality, viz. Paramarthika and Pratibhasika and repudiates the unknown existence of the object, Advaita Vedanta advocates neither a subjective or an objective idealism.

It is to be borne in mind that Advaita is not a speculative metaphysics. Its aim is not to prove any reality whether ideal or non-ideal. The doctrine of Drstisrsti, like any other theory of Advaita, intends to prove the falsity of the world which, on the other hand, intends to awaken the individual soul to its pristine glory, its identity with Brahman. The doctrine of drstisrsti is not a mere metaphysical speculation, it is the encompassing vision of the awakened, where the entire world seems to be a passing dream experience which is to be transcended into a higher vision of reality 'I am Brahman' 'Aham Brahmasmi'.

(Extract of the lecture delivered at the Post Graduate Department of Advaita Vedanta, Sri Jagannath Sanskrit University, Puri)

Dr. Haramohan Mishra

P.G. Dept of Sanskrit

Shailabala Women's college

Cuttack

<http://www.reflectionsindia.org>