

National Seminar
on
**The Tradition of Advaita Vedānta:
Its Contemporary Interpreters and
Prof. Rewati Raman Pandey**
(27-29 July, 2018)

The journey of Indian Culture shows the significant marks of Vedāntic philosophy, especially the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. The tradition of Advaita Vedānta has a line of great Acharyas, which were not only spiritually sound but also scholarly sound. No other schools of Vedānta have been so much perfected from the view point of logical rigour as the works of the learned Acharyas of the school of Advaita Vedānta. Its major Acharyas- Gaudapada, Shankara, Sureshwara, Vachaspati Mishra etc. were not only spiritually competent, but also scholarly competent. Even in modern times, the school of Advaita Vedānta has been represented by great scholars like Prof. K. C. Bhattacharya, Prof. T. M. P. Mahadevan, Prof. Kalidas Bhattacharya, Prof. T. R. V. Murthy, Prof. A. C. Mukherjee etc., who gave their academic career to keep the flag of this school high even in the midst of opposition by non Advaitic thinkers. The contribution of Prof. R. R. Pandey is also important from this perspective. He was a committed Advaitin and remained faithful to the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta even interpreting and evaluating the contribution of science and technology in modern period. All these factors are very much reflected in his books and papers.

Prof. Rewati Raman Pandey was born in a Pandit family, belonging to Sankrityayan Gotra on 2nd April, 1942 at Village Mehandipur in Jaunpur District of Uttar Pradesh. He did his M. A. in 1962 and D. Phil in Philosophy in 1969 from Allahabad University. He was awarded DAAD fellowship for higher studies in Indology in Germany. He also did Darshanacharya from S. S. University in 1972. He was President of Akhil Bhartiya Darshan Parishad from 1994 to 2000 and Chief Editor of Darshanik Traimasik from 2000 to 2004. He was awarded with Swami Pranavanand Darshan Puraskar in 1991 and Brahmasrshi Puraskar in 2004. He joined the Department as Lecturer and became Professor and Head, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University in 1997 for a period of three years. He was also Visiting Professor on Jawaharlal Nehru Chair for Indian Studies at Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius from 1995 to 1997. Prof. Pandey became Vice Chancellor of DDU Gorakhpur University from 2002 to 2004. He took his last breath on 27th July, 2004.

Prof. Pandey authored four major works besides more than hundreds of research papers in National and International Journals, namely- *Man and the Universe*, GDK Publication, Delhi, 1978, *Samagra Yoga*, Sureshonmesh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1985, *Scientific Temper and Advaita Vedānta*, (Edited) Sureshonmesh Prakashan Varanasi, 1991, *Amritasya Putrāh*, Kala Prakashan, Varanasi, 2001. Apart from this, he received a number of recognitions in the academic world. Many of his research scholars are serving as distinguished Professors now in the major institutions of India and abroad.

In modern times, the scholars of Vedānta have developed the philosophy of Vedānta, mainly by adopting two different models. The first model is the evolutionary model. The best representative of this model is found in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. This philosophy is very much critical of the traditional doctrine of Mayavada. The second model is an old age classical model, based on the analysis of the phenomena of illusion resulting in propounding the doctrine of two truths- phenomenal and ultimate truths. This model gives very much importance to the doctrine of Mayavada. Prof. K. C. Bhattacharya, Prof. T. M. P. Mahadevan, Prof. T. R. V. Murthy, Prof. A. C. Mukherjee, Prof. R. K. Tripathi, Swami Karapatriji, Prof. R. R. Pandey etc. were all supporters of Mayavada and constructing the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta in opposition to the evolutionary model. Prof. R. R. Pandey was very much influenced by the great Advaitin Swami Karapatriji and Prof. R. K. Tripathi.

Prof. R. R. Pandey has evaluated the works of science and technology in the light of philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. In his paper on the "The concept of Man, Science, Technology and Scientific Temper", he has tried to show the limitations of scientific approach. According to him, the main tool of scientific enquiry is reason. Reason cannot arrive at final truth, because it can neither get to the roots of the things, nor embrace the totality of their secrets, as it deals only with the finite, the separate, the limited and thus cannot grasp the infinite. It is because of this limitation; Acharya Shankara supporting Shruti dubs reason as unfounded.

Prof. R.R. Pandey was mainly concerned in his philosophical writings in discovering the relation between man, nature and ultimate reality in the light of Indian Philosophy. From this point of view, his book *Man and the Universe* is very important. He maintains that so far as the Indian systems of Philosophy are concerned, we, therefore, find that Nature, man and reality or God are so inter-related that the understanding of all the three is involved in the understanding of any of them. Man cannot be known properly if Prakriti or the world remains unknown because Prakriti operates in man. Also man cannot be known if God remains unknown, because the Divine operates in man. If reality is gradual manifestation of the subtle to the gross, and if the man is being where the subtle and the gross appear as conflicting realities, human destiny or the highest end must necessarily be the discovery of reality or God in every particle of this manifestation.

It is true that a modern man brought up in the atmosphere of utility-oriented society and with a through-going positivistic outlook may not be able to possess this insight which helps him in discovering the true spirit of Indian Philosophy. That is why in Indian systems particularly in the Vedānta the question of "adhikari" has been raised. A particular outlook is to be developed which is an essential prerequisite for understanding the Vedānta-or as a matter of that the spirit of Indian Philosophy.

It is certainly a wrong approach if Prakṛti or the world and man are taken as distinct and separate entities to begin with, and then to find out their relationship. In the Western Philosophy, Descartes is believed to have introduced this dualistic concept. Whitehead has rightly shown that such a bifurcation is arbitrary and artificial. This dualistic approach has created a lot of confusion both in the Western as well as Indian philosophy. But the true tradition of Indian philosophy is not of this nature. The Upanishads, which are the sources of the different systems, have repeatedly emphasized oneness though diversity has not been overlooked or neglected. Man and Prakṛti or the worlds are related but the relation is not that of exclusive polarity. In man there is opposition between the conscious and the non-conscious, the *cit* and the *acit*, but this is only apparent, and its significance when understood reveals that they are complementary to each other in a particular sense. They are distinct but not different and opposing. Our superficial understanding treats them as such. Man and Prakṛti or the world are complementary in the sense that the more we understand Prakṛti the better we understand man, and the more we understand man the better we understand Prakṛti. In fact, neither can be treated and understood in isolation.

It may be noted that one of the great contributions of Indian philosophy specially of Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya is the conception of Jīvanmukti. The goal of life is not something which is to be attained only after death. It can be attained rather realized here and now if the necessary Sadhana is properly pursued. In other words, the goal of life is not the object of mere faith but something which can be realized right in this life and all doubts with regard to it can be eliminated. That is an ideal which is not found in some of the systems of even Indian Philosophy much less in the systems of Western Philosophy.

Man or Jivatman is not entirely a product of Prakṛti though he is under the influence of Prakṛti. This influence is so great that he not only is ignorant about his true nature but also he is unconcerned with respect to the question whether man is something more than what he is taken to be at the ordinarily empirical level of consciousness. Prakṛti or the world has such an influence upon man that he cannot think of himself as something other than as a part of the world. The moment when man feels that he is something more than a part of Nature he becomes reflective and he begins philosophizing. Thus man at some stage of his existence in the world feels that his innermost self cannot be explained in terms of physical or biological entities. This philosophic attitude then forces man to

search for his own essence or reality. At this stage he considers himself as the subject and the world as the object.

When this happens man discovers a world of facts and the world of values in a new perspective. These two worlds which are for the common man constantly producing disharmony and conflict would be properly understood and correlated in life. Values take their origin from facts. That is why knowledge of facts must be a preliminary condition for the knowledge of values. Prakrti supplies us with facts; and from these facts originate multifarious empirical values. When man realizes that these empirical values cannot stand by themselves but must have their locus or ground, the revaluation of values begins. We may say, therefore, that man's search for Reality beyond the domain of Prakrti or the empirical world is a continuous revaluation of values. This revaluation is not in terms of only values but always in terms of facts that is, ultimately the facts are to be interpreted and reinterpreted with the help of the values that have been newly discovered. What is suggested here is that our knowledge of the spirit helps us in getting a more thorough and better understanding of Nature. A proper understanding of Nature is not possible from the standpoint of Nature. It is only possible from the standpoint of Spirit. The 'cit' alone can explain the 'acit'.

This is because as we have already suggested that Prakrti or the world is a manifestation of reality from the subtle to the gross. This means, therefore, that a man is not necessarily required to deal with the two worlds as opposed to each other. It is for the ignorant that Prakrti is considered as a place where man is entangled and loses his freedom. But with knowledge, man gets a new vision and finds out that it is in this world that he can regain his freedom. From the very beginning, therefore, we must get rid of the concept of bifurcation of reality or that of opposition between Nature and Spirit. Man alone can do it because in him the two are felt as distinct. Man, therefore, has a unique status and his responsibility has a profound significance. Prof. R. R. Pandey believes that the discovery of the oneness that is the discovery of reality or God in every particle of the manifestation is the fundamental principle of the Vedānta school of philosophy.

The tentative topics on which research papers are invited:-

1. The interpretations of Mahavakyas.
2. The place of reason in Advaita Vedānta.
3. The concept of Ignorance.
4. The concept of Sakshi
5. Socio-political philosophy of Advaita-Vedānta.
6. States of Consciousness .
7. The Tantric philosophy of Acharya Shankara.
8. The interpretation of Drishti-Srishtivada by Prof. R. R. Pandey.

9. The types of Yoga.
10. The causal theory of Advaita Vedānta.
11. Svatah-prakashavada and Svatah-pramanyavada in Advaita Vedānta.
12. Bondage and Liberation in Advaita Vedānta.
13. The Path of Liberation.
14. Contemporary interpretations of Advaita-Vedānta.
15. Any other topic related with Prof. R. R. Pandey's contribution.

Well researched and well thought out paper are hereby invited. Selected papers will be presented after evaluation by competent experts.

Kindly send your learned papers latest by 10th July, 2018 via email to Professor A.K.Rai (Co-ordinator) - akraibhu@rediffmail.com and Professor Ananda Mishra (Co-cordinator) - anandaphil@gmail.com with a copy to seminar.icpr@gmail.com in Hindi or English (Typed, doc format, English - Times New Roman fonts size 12, Hindi –Unicode or any other font, size 14-16 (in the case of any other fonts than Unicode please send font also).

The venue of the seminar is Department of Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

Tentative date of the seminar is 27-29 July, 2018.

Selected scholars will be provided free hospitality and travel as per ICPR rules.