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अनन्ता

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The method of *Vedānta* according to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra Sarasvatī

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Abstract
This article explores *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's perspective on the method of *adhyāropāpavāda* in *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy, focusing on its application in interpreting the *Upaniṣads*. The *adhyāropāpavāda* method involves a temporary attribution (*adhyāropa*) followed by a negation (*apavāda*) of characteristics onto the ultimate reality, *ātman-brahman*. *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra emphasizes that this methodology serves an epistemic purpose, not ontological, and aims to teach the non-dual nature of reality. Examples from Śaṅkara's commentaries illustrate how these *adhyāropas* function to correct misunderstandings and lead the seeker to realize their true nature. The article concludes that understanding *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's perspective on the *adhyāropāpavāda* methodology is crucial for interpreting the *Upaniṣads* in a purely non-dual sense.

Keyword: *Advaita Vedānta*, Svāmī Saccidānandendra Sarasvatī, *Adhyāropapavāda*, methodology, *Upaniṣad*

Introduction
The entirety of *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's work, one might say, revolves around the fundamental question he poses at the beginning of his *magnum opus* *Vedāntaprakriyāpratyabhijñā*: "Where and how to recognize the method (*prakriyā*) of *Vedānta*?" [1]. From his point of view, the need to recognize the method of *Vedānta* arises because it would have fallen into oblivion over time, mainly due to the tendency of post-Śaṅkara authors to reify the language of teachings and thereby rendering them ineffective (Loundo 2015: 66). This has led to the emergence of a series of different doctrinal methodologies (*prakriyā*), which, while sharing the main axiom of *Advaita* that there is a single non-dual reality called *brahman*, contradict each other on empirical (*vyāvahārika*) matters [2], making it difficult for the modern student to discern which is the authentic doctrine of Śaṅkara. According to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, only through the rediscovery of the authentic methodology of *Vedānta* is it possible to transform the apparent "chaos" of the upaniṣadic teachings into an ordered cosmos, into a coherent system in which the apparent contradictions between the vedāntic statements are resolved and their internal concordance (*samanvaya*) emerges (Sarasvati 2020: 30).
Sarasvati's commitment to restoring the method of *Vedānta* to contemporary researchers should not be seen, however, as a purely theoretical interest or as a simple contribution to the history of vedāntic ideas; rather, like every traditional Indian thinker, for *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra the teachings of *Vedānta* must have as its primary objective the leading of the disciple to the realization of the ultimate purpose of human life, to the attainment of the *summum bonum* (*niḥśreyas*, *mokṣa*), and it is precisely in this that he attributes primary importance to the method.

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[1] Athaiṣā prakriyā kutra katham pratyabhijñātavyā. (Sarasvatī 1964: 14).
[2] For example ekajīva- and nānājīva-vāda, dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi- and sṛṣṭidṛṣṭi-vāda, abhāsa-, pratibimba- e avaccheda-vāda. See Roodurmun (2002).

Essence of the Method
According to the doctrine of *Advaita*, the *śruti* is the means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) that allows one to know *brahman*, the absolute reality, without which it could never be grasped [3]. However, the śruti does not reveal brahman as a positive entity, since brahman can never become the object of thought or word, as, as the famous mantra of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.4.9) says, "from it, words, not having reached it, turn back together with the mind" [4]. The śruti, as Śaṅkara repeatedly states in his works [5], reveals brahman only by removing ignorance (*avidyā*), that is, the false conceptions that man has about his nature. It is therefore an eminently negative or apophatic task, to accomplish which it uses a specific linguistic methodology, called *adhyāropāpavādanyāya* or *adhyāropāpavādatarka*, that is, "the method of intentional superimposition and its subsequent negation". That this is the traditional methodology of *Vedānta* is reported to us by Śaṅkara himself, who, commenting on the *Gītā* 13.13, declares: "And on this subject there is a saying of those who know the tradition: what is free from all distinctions is taught through deliberate superimposition and its subsequent rescission" [6]. In *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's explanation, strictly based on the texts of the triple foundation (*prasthānatraya*) of *Vedānta* and on the authoritative commentaries (*bhaṣya*) of Śaṅkara, the *adhyāropāpavāda* method consists of two complementary procedures. The first, called *adhyāropa*, consists of deliberately or pedagogically ascribing some false attributions to *brahman*, in order to remove some erroneous beliefs that the knowledge seeker naturally possesses. The second phase, *apavāda*, consists instead in the denial of these pedagogical attributions, aimed at preventing any possibility of reification of the teaching. *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra describes the essence of this method as follows: "The essence of the *adhyāropa* method is that imaginary characteristics are first ascribed to *brahman*, serving as a denial of everything incompatible with them. Subsequently, the ultimate truth is imparted by also refuting the falsely attributed characteristics, through a total negation of all specific superimpositions on *brahman*" [7].

According to this negative methodology, therefore, every statement (*vākya*) of the *śruti* must be read either as an *adhyāropa* or as an *apavāda*. In the former case, it aims to negate the natural superimpositions that man projects onto the ultimate reality; in the latter case, it aims to negate the ascriptions imparted for didactic purposes. This means that the *adhyāropāpavāda* method is *apavāda-pradhāna*, that is, it is primarily negative. All statements that the *Upaniṣads* make about the characteristics of the *ātman-brahman* such as causality, omnipresence, etc., should not be taken "literally", as if they were expounding a positive doctrine (*vāda*), whether cosmological, theological, etc., but should be considered valid only to the extent that they remove some erroneous conceptions. As prof. Loundo correctly observes: "The *adhyāropāpavāda* method constitutes a kind of 'linguistic game' in which every sentence of the *Upaniṣads* is epistemologically relevant not by virtue of what it

intrinsically refers to, but on the basis of what it implicitly denies." (Loundo 2015: 75). From this derives the principle that there is not necessarily a direct correspondence between the signifier and the signified in upaniṣadic statements. As will be seen shortly, numerous statements with a positive or affirmative structure must be read as having an eminently negative meaning.

Two-standpoints approach
According to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, essential to the *adhyāropāpavāda* method is the use of the so-called "two points of view," namely the relative and the absolute, to which he has given particular attention in his works. These two points of view are used by all the texts of the *prasthānatraya* and correspond to two different ways of looking at the nature of things. The first is called *lokadṛṣṭi* or *vyāvahārika*, and is nothing but the empirical point of view of the common man, who considers himself a transmigrating soul (*saṃsārin*) within a world prejudicially considered real and eternal. The second is instead *śāstradṛṣṭi* or *pāramārthikadṛṣṭi*, the point of view of the Scriptures or of the absolute reality, in which the perspective is reversed and the man, with the help of the Scriptures, discovers himself to be identical with *brahman*. *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra describes the use of these two points of view in the *Upaniṣads* as follows: "The teaching of *Śrutis* pre-supposes two different points of view in its procedure. One of these is the natural view, the empirical view which persuades a man to look upon himself as an ego endowed with mind and senses, and stationed in a manifold universe along with other embodied beings like himself, knowing, acting, reaping and experiencing the fruits of his actions good or bad. This view the *Śruti* calls the view of *Avidyā* in contrast to the correct view of *Vidyā*, from the standpoint of *Ātman* as He is." (Sarasvatī 2020: 53).

The *adhyāropāpavāda* method consists precisely in leading the disciple from the natural point of view, which is the empirical and ignorant point of view, to the correct point of view, which is the absolute and enlightened point of view. From this perspective, every scriptural statement must be understood as belonging to one of these two points of view, and it is the duty of the commentator to distinguish which one applies to each passage.

According to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, therefore, the *Upaniṣads* employ both these two points of view in the course of their *adhyāropāpavāda* methodology. From the empirical point of view, they employ a temporary attribution (*adhyāropa*) of some characteristic onto the *ātman-brahman*, and subsequently negate it (*apavāda*) from the point of view of the Scriptures. It is important to note that, according to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, the difference between these two points of view is epistemic, not ontological. The two points of view do not represent different "levels of reality," as will be affirmed later by post-Śaṅkara authors, but only different ways of seeing or experiencing the one reality.

Applications of the Method
The *adhyāropāpavāda* method, writes *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, "though being one in its essence, is susceptible to countless applications," [8] which vary depending on the teaching context, the abilities, and attitudes of the disciples. In general, however, as suggested by prof. Hegde (2024), we can classify all *adhyāropas* into three

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[3] See BSBh 1.1.4, 2.1.11.
[4] Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha.
[5] See BSBh 1.1.4, BGBh 2.18, 2.69, 18.50, BUBh 1.4.10, TU 1.11, GKBh 2.32.
[6] Tathā hi saṃpradāyavidāṃ vacanam adhyāropāpavādābhyāṃ niṣprapañcaṃ prapañcyate iti.
[7] Adhyāropaprakriyāyā hi jīvitam idam yan mithyāvikalpān api brahmaṇy adhyāropya tatrādhyāropitād anyasya pratidvandvinaḥ pratiṣedhaḥ tatas tasyāpy adhyāropitasyāpavāda iti (Sarasvatī 1964: 29).

[8] saiṣā prakriyā ekaiva sati nānā rūpāṇi dhatte (Sarasvatī 1964:136).

types: words (*śabda*), phrases or syntactic constructions (*vākya*), methodologies or procedures (*prakriyā*). These types of *adhyāropas* can be easily understood through examples.

A classic example of a *śabda-adhyāropa* is found in Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.1.3). Here the illustrious commentator informs us that the word *ātman* must be read as an *adhyāropa*, insofar as it does not want to be a designation of a positive reality, but rather a linguistic means (*upāya*) that serves to correct the common man's identification with the non-Self (*anātman*), and to direct his attention to the fact that his true nature is distinct from them. Using the *ātman* as an *adhyāropa* serves to prevent the reification of the Self and, at the same time, of its *negatum*, i.e., body, mind, etc., which, not corresponding to the true nature of man, must be discarded as unreal (*asat*). *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra explains this principle in the following terms: "*Ātman* is assumed to be an individual self in order to explode the delusion that the body, the senses or the mind may be the self. Thus proceeding from the body one rises to the Consciousness of the true Self by taking for granted that the inner and more subtle non-Self is the actual Self and rejecting the grosser non-Self which was previously mistaken for the Self." (Sarasvatī 1996: 63).

An example of *adhyāropa* applied at the level of syntactic constructions is found instead in Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.1.1). Here Śaṅkara shows how in the statement "*satyam jñānam ānantam brahma*," "*brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinite," all the words are nothing but *adhyāropas* that perform a specific function, namely to correct and exclude some possible undesirable connotations of the other words. The term *satya*, first of all, serves to distinguish *brahman* from all that is transitory (*anitya*) and therefore, for *Advaita* doctrine, unreal (*asat*). The term *jñāna* serves instead to avoid possible undesirable connotations of the term *satya*, such as being a material cause devoid of consciousness (*acetana*), like clay for the pot. Finally, since the term *jñāna* could be interpreted in the sense of an act of empirical knowledge, and therefore limited and subject to change, in order to differentiate true Consciousness from empirical cognitions, the epithet "*ānanta*", "infinite," is added. *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra comments as follows on this linguistic strategy adopted by the *Upaniṣad*: "By applying the epithet *satyam* to *brahman* the *Śruti* wants to tell us that *brahman* is no effect. Similarly, we have to understand that the expression '*jñāna*m *brahma*' (*brahman* is consciousness) aims at revealing that *brahman* is unlike in nature to such things as a pot. For the *bhaṣya* says that since it is declared that *brahman* is the cause, it is liable to be taken to be an efficient factor like any ordinary thing, and an insentient thing like clay. Hence to ward off this supposition, it is said '*brahman* is consciousness." (Sarasvatī 2001: 65).

As for the *adhyāropas* applied at the level of methodologies (*prakriyā*), they are of multiple types: the method of the manifestation (*sṛṣṭi*) of the universe, the method of the five sheaths (*pañcakośa*), the method of the three states of consciousness (*avasthātraya*), and others. Taking for example the method of the manifestation of the universe, on whose *modus operandi* Śaṅkara has always expressed himself in extremely clear terms. In many *Upaniṣads* [9], we find exposed a model or scheme of manifestation in which *brahman* is always postulated as the first cause (*kāraṇa*) of the world of multiplicity, while the latter is presented as its effect (*kārya*); however, the creationist model is never

uniform, but differs depending on the text. To reconcile these differences, one must keep in mind that in these texts causality (*kāraṇatva*) is only an intentional superimposition (*adhyāropa*) of the Scriptures, a linguistic strategy which has two fundamental purposes: on the one hand, it wants to deny the gross conception of the realists that there exists an objective world, independent of a consciousness foundation; on the other hand, it serves to establish the non-difference between cause and effect. As *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra writes: "Therefore, with the methodology that distinguishes the cause from the effect, the manifestation is accepted by the *Upaniṣads* not in order to describe the manifestation, but in order to show the non-duality of the absolute reality, highlighting that there is no distinction between the world, which is the effect, and *brahman*, its cause." [10] This statement by *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra finds foundation in multiple textual passages of Śaṅkara's commentaries, in which he repeatedly declares that the passages of the *Upaniṣads* dealing with the manifestation of the universe do not really refer to a real creative process, but only desire to indicate the unity of the *ātman-brahman* [11].

According to *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra, therefore, only by keeping in mind this peculiar *adhyāropāpavāda* methodology is it possible to correctly interpret the *Upaniṣads* in a purely non-dual sense. All statements implying duality (*dvaita vākya*), in fact, must be read as simple temporary ascriptions serving certain pedagogical purposes, while only non-dual statements (*advaita vākya*) have the ultimate purpose of describing things as they really are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's elucidation of the *adhyāropāpavāda* methodology in *Vedānta* provides a profound framework for understanding the *Upaniṣads'* teachings on non-duality. By highlighting the epistemic nature of *adhyāropāpavāda*, *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra emphasizes that the *Upaniṣads* employ a variety of strategies to lead the seeker from the empirical to the ultimate reality. The classification of *adhyāropas* into words, phrases, and methodologies underscores the versatility and depth of the upaniṣadic teachings, accommodating various contexts and levels of understanding. *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's insights remind us that the *Upaniṣads'* ultimate goal is to reveal the non-dual nature of reality, and that every statement implying duality should be understood as a temporary pedagogical tool. Understanding and applying *Svāmī* Saccidānandendra's perspective on the *adhyāropāpavāda* methodology enriches our interpretation of the Upaniṣads, guiding us towards a deeper realization of the ultimate truth of non-duality.

Abbreviations
BGBh: *Bhagavadgītāśāṅkarabhāṣya*
BSBh: *Brahmasūtraśāṅkarabhāṣya*
BṛU: *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*
BṛUBh: *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadśāṅkarabhāṣya*
ChU: *Chāndogyopaniṣad*
ChUBh: *Chāndogyopaniṣadśāṅkarabhāṣya*
MāU: *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad*
GKBh: *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣadgauḍapādakārikābhāṣya*
TU: *Taittirīyopaniṣad*

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9 See BṛU 1.4.1, ChU 6.2.1, TU 2.1.1.

10 tadevaṃ kāryakāraṇavivekaprakriyayā śrautyā svīkṛtā sṛṣṭir na sṛṣṭipratipādhanārthā kiṃ tarhi kāryasya jagataḥ kāraṇabhūtabrahmānanyatvajñāpanena paramārthasyādvaitatvajñāpanārthā // (Sarasvatī 1964: 54).
11 See BSBh 1.1.11, 1.4.7, 1.4.14.

TUBh: *Taittirīyopaniṣadśāṅkarabhāṣya*

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