Brahma satyam jagat mithyA

Translation of an article in Sanskrit by Shastraratnakara Polagam Sriramasastri (Translated by S.N.Sastri)

The Reality, Brahman, which is free from all evil, which is pure consciousness-Bliss, which is the substratum of this illusory world, that I am.

Some say the world is real and Brahman is unreal; other clever ones that both are unreal; some that both are real; thus do they speak in three different ways because of multiplicity of views.

shruti says Brahman is real and the world is illusory. The lokAyatas hold that the world is real and Brahman is unreal; the mAdhyamikas that both are unreal; the dvaitins hold that both are real; and advaitins that Brahman is real and the world is illusory (mithyA). The views are thus four in number and there is no fifth,

The lokAyatas (CAruvAkas), the followers of the doctrines of BRihaspati, who accept only perception (pratyakSha) as pramANa, not accepting Brahman which is the content of the knowledge contained in the shAstras, because of not accepting shAstras as pramANa, and who are intensely attached to the world which is the object of natural avidyA, fall in the first category.

The mAdhyamikas, the first disciples of Buddha who, though accepting inference as another pramANa like pratyakSha, because it is very useful for worldly activities which cannot be served by pratyakSha, and who do not, like the previous ones (LokAyatas), accept shruti as pramANa and consequently do not accept Brahman which is the content of vidyA, but who are entirely free from attachment to the world which is an object of natural avidyA, because of acquired puNya, belong to the second category.

The dvaitins, with many internal differences as followers of dvaita, vishiShTAdvaita, shuddhAdvaita and other systems, other than mlmAmsakas and sAnkhyas, who accept shruti also as pramANa in respect of many matters not knowable by pratyakSha and inference and

realizing that the world cannot be rejected without accepting something real as basis, accept Brahman because of their being Astikas, but being unable to get rid of their attachment to the world which is the object of avidyA because of beginningless and deep-rooted vAsanas, and being content with knowing the intermediate purport of the shruti, form the third category.

The mlmAmsakas and the sAnkhyas, though accepting the authority of shruti, believe that no one would perform vedic rituals or conduct inquiry into the Reality if they believed that one's desire can be fulfilled only by the grace of the supreme Being arising from worship of the supreme Being with devotion. So they conceal Brahman and do not accept it. Even though they do not accept Brahman, they accept an eternal indwelling self fit to be really non-different from Brahman. They do not accept the ephemeral body, etc., itself as the self like the cArvAkas or Bauddhas.

The advaitins, though accepting the three pramANas (pratyakSha, anumAna and shabda), consider shabda to be the most powerful since human beings are superior to animals and so the shAstra which applies only to human beings is more powerful than pratyakSha and anumAna which are common to all animals, and also because of the smRiti statement, "The shruti is, by origin, the most powerful among the three pramANas". Being, by the grace of God, free from attachment to the world that is the content of avidyA, the advaitins, who understand the ultimate purport of the shruti, belong to the fourth category.

It is the view of the advaitins that is known in the world as "brahma satyam jagat mithyA", which is the teaching of the upaniShads. This has two parts, the reality of Brahman and the unreality of the world. The first part, reality of Brahman, is common to all the dvaitins of the third category above who accept Ishvara. The second part, unreality of the world, is common to the advaitins and the Bauddhas. But there is this difference. The former (advaitins) consider everything to be indescribable (anirvacanlyam). As stated in khaNDanakhaNDakhAdya, "The BrahmavAdins say that this world, different from consciousness, is different from the real as well as the unreal", and as stated in the

commentary on Advaitasiddhi, "In effect it should be understood that in respect of all things different from Brahman our view is similar to that of the nihilist Buddhists" and is thus similar to the view of the madhyamikas who fall in the second category. The two parts together form the view of avaitins alone. That is why the two are declared together by advaitins in order to eliminate other views. For this reason, though there is similarity between advaitins and Bauddhas as 'advayavAdins', there is this great difference between them that, the advaita accepted by the Bauddhas is derived as 'advaitam is not dvaitam' (na dvaitam advaitam), and denotes void which is the opposite of dvaita and is the absence of dvaita without any substratum, while the advaita accepted by advaitins is derived as 'where there is no second' (na vidyate dvaitam etra), and denotes absence of a second thing (dvaita) on a substratum, Brahman indicated by the absence of a second.

Therefore, though the unreality of the world is common to advaitins and mAdhyamikas, advains cannot be considered as mAdhyamikas because the reality of Brahman accepted by advaitins is not accepted by the mAdhyamikas. Otherwise, since the acceptance of the reality of the world is common to dvaitins and LokAyatas, it would not be possible to deny that dvaitins are also LokAyatas. It should be accepted by pure-hearted persons that If it is desired to prevent dvaitins being considered as LokAyatas on the ground of their acceptance of the reality of the world, then advaitins also cannot be considered as mAdhyamikas (merely because they accept the unreality of the world).

This is to be added here. All the followers of veda, both dvaitins and advaitins, except mlmAmsakas and sAnkhyas, accept the reality of Brahman for which shruti is the pramANa, because of the authoritativeness of shruti. LokAyatas, mAdhyamikas and others who do not follow the shruti do not accept Brahman since they do not accept the authoritativeness of shruti. Among these who are outside the vedic fold, those other than mAdhyamikas accept the world as real and mAdhyamikas as unreal. They do not quote shruti as authority for their view that the world is real or unreal, for the reason that they do not accept shruti as authority. But they support their view with the help of

pratyakSha and anumAna. Though the shruti also restates here and there the facts that follow from pratyakSha and anumAna and the views held by those who follow these two pramANas, as subsidiary to something else, and reveal facts about dharma and adharma which are the cause of purity and impurity of the mind, which is useful for imparting knowledge of the reality, its ultimate purport is in Brahman which is very profound and inaccessible to ordinary vision and it has therefore absolute validity. The ultimate purport of shruti is not in the world which is different from Brahman or in its qualities of reality or unreality or in dharma or adharma, nor is its absolute validity in respect of these. But this purport is only intermediate and its validity in respect of these is only for empirical purposes. This is proved by the shruti statements, "I tell you briefly of that goal which all the vedas propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing to attain which people practise brahmacarya; it is this. Om". "One who does not know the vedas does not know that great One", "I ask you about that puruSha of the upaniShads", "Everything other than this is limited", "There is no diversity whatever here". If, by the mere acceptance of the unreality of the world which is not the ultimate purport of shruti the advains are equated wuth Bauddhas, then why should the dvaitins not be equated with LokAyatas on the ground that they accept the reality of the world as the LokAyatas do? Therefore this talk of BhAskara and others who do not understand the difference between the various systems and of others who follow them by equating with other systems is meaningless. Let the wise ones who are capable of making subtle distinctions understand this.

In fact, the illusoriness (mithyAtva) of the world is the exclusive tenet of the advaitins who accept anirvacanlyakhyAti. According to the mAdhyamikas who accept asatkhyAti, the world is asat and so they do not accept mithyA which is different from both sat and asat.

Similarly, the reality of Brahman is also, in fact, the exclusive tenet of the advaitins. Because of the reality of Brahman it follows that the world is not real and because the world is unreal it follows that Brahman is real and free from all the three limitations and is the substratum of the world appearance and what remains when the world is negated. According to the dvaitins there is as much reality for the world as for Brahman.

MAdhavAcArya has said in his commentary on BrahmagItA," Reality is the criterion for being the substratum of illusion and the limit of the negation of the illusion. Thus, the substratum of the superimposed duality and the limit of its negation has to be accepted as what is free from the three kinds of limitation and non-dual. Otherwise the illusion will be without a substratum and there will be no limit for the negation. That which is asat, being devoid of existence, cannot be the substratum or the limit of negation". In Laghucandrika, being the substratum of illusion is stated as the cause of the reality of Brahman by the statement, "Being the substratum of illusion is itself the cause of Brahman being reality of the nature of non-negatability". Thus it should be understood by the wise that the exclusive conclusion of the advaita system is that the reality of Brahman and the illusoriness of the world are mutually the causes of each other.

Among the three views, (1) both Brahman and the world are unreal, (2) Brahman alone is unreal and (3) Brahman alone is real, the view that Brahman alone is real has been established as correct in the bhAShya on the brahmasUtra, III. Ii. 22—"The upaniShadic statement "Now therefore the description: Not so, Not so (neti, neti) certainly denies the limitation that is being dealt with and then speaks of something more". Three doubts have been raised: (1) Does this negation deny the forms as well as the possessor of forms, or only one of them, (2) if only one of them is denied, then whether Brahman is denied keeping intact the forms, or (3) are the forms denied, retaining Brahman? The first two are rejected and and the third, the reality of Brahman alone, has been declared as accepted. While commenting on the same brahmasUtra, Srikantha and Ramanuja have, after stating the advaitic view that Brahman alone is real as the pUrvapakSha, rejected it and held that both Brahman and the world are real.

The fourth view, that Brahman is real and the world is illusory, is what the pramANas in the form of the vedantas, the brahmasUtras whch determine their meaning, and the BhagavadgltA, ViShNupurANa,

BhAgavata, MahAbhArata and other works which are supplementary to them establish when examined.

 Thus, the taittirlyashruti, in the Anandavalli, while inquiring into Brahman, defines Brahman as Reality by the statement 'Brahman is Reality, Consciousness and Infinite', and thereby makes it known that everything other than Brahman is unreal. If the shruti considered the world also to be real, reality could not be the definition of Brahman, since there would be overapplicability of the definition to the world. Similarly, by defining Brahman as infinite, the same shruti declares that the entire world which is different from Brahman is limited and consequently non-eternal. Thus it shows that reality and eternality are for Brahman alone. That is why another shruti statement, "What is other than this is limited" says that everything other than Brahman is limited. BhagavAn BAdarAyaNa, the author of brahmasUtra, has determined the indicatory mark of Brahman to be infinitude itself in the sutra, I.i.22, "AkAsha is Brahman because of its indicatory mark". It is only because infinitude is exclusive to Brahman that Brahman fas been denoted by the term 'infinite' in the sutra, III.ii.26. It is just because reality and eternality, and their opposites, unreality and non-eternality go together, that the item 'discrimination between nitya and anitya' in the four preliminary requisites (sAdhanacatuShTayam) has been explained as 'discrimination between satya and asatya' by the author of BhAmati. In Anandavalli (in taitt. upaniShad), the statements, "If anyone knows Brahman as non-existent, he himself becomes non-existent. If anyone knows that Brahman exists, then they consider him as existing by virtue of that" the reality of Brahman has been confirmed after rejecting the views of lokAyatas and mAdhyamikas that Brahman is unreal. The view that the world is illusory has not, in the same way, been doubted and rejected anywhere in the shruti, but it has been supported everywhere. Moreover, there itself, statement, "The Real became the real and the unreal and

whatever there is. That is called Real" (satyam ca anRitam ca satyam abhavat yadidam kinca. tat satyam ityAcakShate- taitt. up., it is explained that Brahman which appears as the world of vyAvahArika and prAtibhAsika reality is the actual Reality. In the shikShAvalli the nature of Brahman as real has been particularly stated by the words 'AkAshasharIram brahma satyAtmA' (Brahman whose body is as subtle as AkAsha has satya as its nature).

Similarly, the reality of Brahman alone, indicated as the cause (of the world), has been asserted, after stating the illusoriness of the entire world which is a modification, by the terms "based on words", "name", "only", etc., by the following statements:-

vAcArambhaNam vikAro nAmadheyam mRittiketyeva satyam- (ch. up. 6.1.4)—All modification is name only, based on words; it is really only clay.

By the example of the use of the heated axe for determining whether a person is guilty or not, it is stated that there is bondage for a person attached to the illusory world and liberation for one who is attached to Brahman. By this it has been declared that Brahman is real and the world is illusory.

lōkāyika mādhyamika cāruvāka viśiṣṭādvaita sāṅkhya mīmāṁsaka