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Ābhāsavāda in *Pratyabhijñā* and *Advaita Vedānta*

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Abstract

Ābhāsavāda, the doctrine of appearance, is a pivotal concept in both non-dual *Śaiva* philosophy, *Pratyabhijñā* and *Advaita Vedānta*, though with distinct interpretations. In *Pratyabhijñā*, *Ābhāsavāda* posits that all phenomena are manifestations (*Ābhāsa*) of Śiva's inherent consciousness, reflecting the unity of the self with the absolute. In *Advaita Vedānta, Ābhāsa* refers to the illusory appearance of the world superimposed on *Brahman* due to *Avidyā* (ignorance), emphasising non-duality. While *Pratyabhijñā* views appearances as real within Śiva's play, *Advaita* regards them as *Mithyā* (neither real nor unreal). This comparative exploration reveals profound metaphysical insights into reality, consciousness, and the nature of existence.

Keywords: *Ābhāsa, Advaita Vedānta, Brahman, Māyā, Śiva, Pratyabhijñā, Svātanrya*

1. Introduction

All philosophical discourses have concepts about the perceiving world and have formulated the theory of causation to define the order of creation and reality or the unreality of the cause and effects according to the conceptual doctrines. The Indian systems of philosophy, especially, have put forward many causational theories (कारणतावादाः). Some important ones among them are - *Ārambhavāda* of *Nyāyavaiśeṣikas*, *Saṅghātavāda* of Buddhists, *Pariṇāmavāda* of *Sāṅkhyas* and *Vivartavāda* of *Vedāntins* (आरम्भवादः कणभक्षपक्षः संघातवादस्तुभदन्तपक्षः। सांख्यादिपक्षः परिणामवादः वेदान्तपक्षस्तुविवर्तवादः।। *Samkṣepaśārīraka*, 2.63) *Ābhāsavāda* of *Śaivādvaitins* or *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy is another important theory to be included in the group.

The non-dualistic philosophies utilised the causational theories not only for describing the condition of the experiencing world but also to establish the non-dual ultimate reality which is a non-ending and ever-shining principle. *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy had culminated the non-dualistic ideas by describing *Paramaśiva* as the crest of each and everything. For *Advaita Vedānta* the crest is *Brahman*.

Even though the *Pratyabhijñā* system accepts only reality in everything, the causational theory to describe the multiplicity put forward is *Ābhāsavāda*, the theory of appearance. Ābhāsa is a familiar word in both non-dualistic philosophies *Pratyabhijñā* and *Advaita Vedānta*.

2. Derivation of the word *Ābhāsa*

The word *Ābhāsa* is derived from the root *bhās* (भासृदीप्तौ), which means 'to shine' or 'to appear' with the prefix '*a*' having meanings 'near to', 'as far as', 'a little' and 'diminution'. So *Ābhāsa* is shining forth or shining a little (ईषद्भासनम्), and shining fully. (सङ्कोचरूपेषदर्थकात्आङ्उपसर्गपूर्वकात्प्रकाशापरपर्यायदीप्त्यर्थाद्भासधातोः घञन्तान्निष्पन्नः आभासशब्दः। आभासवादविचारेतुपरिच्छिन्नप्रकाशरूपेयौगिकएवार्थेप्रयुज्यते।) *Ābhāsa* is a technical Sanskrit term used to express the theory of causality in various philosophies like Kashmir *Śaivism* and *Advaita Vedānta*. In the *Nyāya* system, the word *Ābhāsa* is used to denote the fallacy. *Hetvābhāsa* is a familiar word in Indian logic. *Hetvābhāsa* means a fallacious reason which looks like a hetu but is not hetu (हेतुवदाभासतेइति). It prevents us from arriving at an *Anumāna* (inference). In *Pratyabhijñā* Philosophy, it is used in a different sense.

3. *Ābhāsa* in *Pratyabhijñā*

Ābhāsavāda is the theory of manifestation or the theory of creation accepted in *Pratyabhijñā* Philosophy. It is

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connected with *Parameśvara*, the Ultimate Reality. It has both ontological and epistemological backgrounds. This philosophy says that the visible universe is the manifestation of Śiva, the Advaitic principle.

Abhinavagupta explains this as the shining forth of something: आभासः प्रकाशनम्। (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) आभासः प्रकाशमानता। (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) सईश्वरस्वभावआत्माप्रकाशतेतावत्, तत् रचअस्यस्वातन्त्र्यमितिनकेनचिद्वपुषानप्रकाशते, तत्रअप्रकाशात्मनापिप्रकाशतेप् रकाशात्मनापि। (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) It is nothing but the disclosing of something unknown. It is the knowing of the subject as an object. (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) It is the external manifestation of the endless internal forms that already existed in the universal consciousness Śiva, the self-contained complete form without any manifestation. (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy explains the theory of *Ābhāsa* as the theory of causality or manifestation. The power of manifestation is called *Nirmātṛtā*. *Utpala* says thus:

एषचानन्तशक्तित्वादेवमाभासयत्यमून्।
भावानिच्छावशादेषाक्रियानिर्मातृतास्यसा।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

This power of action is only endowed with sentient subject and transmuting to cause and effect or subject and object. Utpala rejects the subjectivity and energy of inanimate beings. (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) The world of cause and effect is nothing but the experience of internal and external object transformation through the power of someone. Utpala says that there is only one action, which has an inside, and outside orderly existence, it belongs to only one, who is capable of his two forms:

कार्यकारणतालोकेसान्तर्विपरिवर्तिनः।
उभयेन्द्रियवेद्यत्वंतस्यकस्यापिशक्तितः।।
एवमेकाक्रियासैषासक्रमान्तर्बहिस्थितिः।
एकस्यैवोभयाकारसहिष्णोरुपपादिता।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

Abhinavagupta has clarified this view in *Vimarśinī*. (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) Thus in *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy, the cause of all is Śiva and the objects are also Śiva, who makes this universe within himself with his free will. His internal consciousness transforms into outside objects that only have the true nature of consciousness. So this theory puts forth the theory of all-inclusive universal consciousness or self*Anuttara*. This theory of causality is named *Ābhāsavāda* in *Pratyabhijñā* Philosophy.

In some cases, *Ābhāsa* depends upon immediate sense contact, and in other cases, as in the case of the blind or thick darkness, it does not depend upon the sense contact. There is no difference in the essential nature of the manifestation of objects figuring in determinate cognitions, referring to the past, present, or future objects. Utpala says thus:

तात्कालिकाक्षसामक्ष्यसापेक्षाःकेवलंक्वचित्।
आभासाःअन्यथान्यत्रत्वन्धतमसादिषु।।
विशेषोर्थावभासस्यसत्तायांनपुनःक्वचित्।
विकल्पेषुभवेत्भाविभवद्भूतार्थगामिषु।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

In the *Ābhāsas* of being and not-being, the externality is merely an attribute. It does not constitute their vital nature and so they always exist internally:

भावाभावावभासानांबाह्यतोपाधिरिष्यते।
नात्मासत्तातत्तेषामान्तराणांसतांसदा।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

Always *Ābhāsas* exist inside in the form of pure consciousness and the outside existence is because of Māyā. Utpala says:

चिन्मयत्वेऽवभासानामन्तरेवस्थितिःसदा।
माययाभासमानानांबाह्यत्वाद्बहिरप्यसौ।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

For these two types of *Ābhāsas*, i.e. the *Āntara* (internal) and *Bāhya* (external), the substratum is only one Śiva or Maheśvara. His free will plays an important role. Bhāskarakaṇṭha says that *Deva* has the nature of play, and the play is nothing but *Svātantrya*:देवोहिक्रीडाशील उच्यते, क्रीडाएवचस्वातन्त्र्यम्। (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) *Maheśvara* externalises the internal beings through his free will. He is like a *Yogī* (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) and depends on nothing for manifestation. Utpala says:

चिदात्मैवहिदेवोऽन्तःस्थितमिच्छावशाद्बहिः।
योगीवनिरुपादानमर्थजातंप्रकाशयेत्।।
(Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

In this context, Abhinava says that his *Svātantrya* is nothing but his consciousness indicated by the word *Deva.* (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) *Svātanrya* is the real nature of *Maheśvara* which depends on nothing. It belongs to the group of bliss, affluence and consciousness, which are his characters. Abhinavagupta says in *Vimarśinī* that independence itself is the bliss, sovereignty, and consciousness: अन्यनिरपेक्षताएवपरमार्थतः आनन्दः, ऐश्वर्यम्, स्वातन्त्र्यम्, चैतन्यम्। (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998) *Maheśvara* by his power of sovereignty adopts the form of an individual being. In this system, *Ābhāsa* is a process by which everything becomes reality. (Subramania Iyer, K.A. & Pandey, K.C., 1998)

Thus in Pratyabhijñā philosophy, *Ābhāsa* signifies the manifestation of reality as both subjective and objective. It highlights that all perceptions are reflections of Śiva's consciousness. Through recognising this divine interplay, one transcends duality, realising the self as the ultimate, all-encompassing consciousness, bridging illusion and truth within the non-dual framework.

4. *Ābhāsa* in *Advaita Vedānta*

In *Advaita Vedānta*, *Ābhāsa* is used to specify some unreal notion of appearance. Gouḍapāda the founder of *Advaita Vedānta* makes use of the word *Ābhāsa* in the same sense. He defines the ultimate reality as birthless, motionless, non-material, calmand non-dual by negating attributes like birth and motion. The birthless that appears as though possessed of birth is called *Jātyābhāsa*, that which appears as though moving is called *Calābhāsa*, and that which appears as a thing having attributes is called *Vastvābhāsa*. (Swamy Mridananda, 1988) While describing *Adhyāsa*, Śaṅkara uses the word *Avabhāsa* in the same sense in his introductory *Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra*. (Anantakrishna Shastri, 2000) Other commentators on the *Bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara also explained the term *Ābhāsa*. (Anantakrishna Shastri, 2000) Here it means that the appearance of knowledge is rejected or affected logically after the real cognition.

In *Advaita Vedānta*, *Ābhāsa* is indescribable because the cause of *Ābhāsa* is *Māyā*, which is indefinable as *Sat* or *Asat*. It is also used as illusory knowledge of silver on a conch shell. Vidyāraṇya, an *Advaita* scholar stated that *Ābhāsa* is used in the sense of reflection. (*Pañcadaśī*,)

According to *Advaita*,*Vedānta*, the real thing is only *Brahman* and the universe is unreal. Śaṅkara has advocated *Vivartavāda* to describe the non-duality of the ultimate reality. He accepts empirical reality for all universal things and illusory reality for some unreal appearances and transcendental reality is accepted only in Brahman. Even though he uses the word *Ābhāsa* in his *Bhāṣyas*, he does not use the term to denote a theory of causation, It is Sureśvara, his disciple, who used the word *Ābhāsa* to denote the theory of causation, *Ābhāsavāda*. (Potty, V. R. 2008.) According to Sureśvara, *Ābhāsa* is divided into two – *Kāraṇābhāsa* and *Kāryābhāsa*. The appearance of ignorance is *Kāraṇābhāsa* and the appearance of the *Ahaṅkāra* etc. is known as *Kāryābhāsa*. (Anandagiri, 1982) *Ābhāsa* is necessary for the origin of all different forms of the selves and the accomplishment of the empirical and phenomenal status of beings. The world originated from ignorance gets entity through the *Ābhāsa*. (Anandagiri, 1982) The universe is the unreal appearance (*Ābhāsa*) of the *Brahman*. Ignorance or *Avidya* is acting as a screen (*Yavanikā*) which marks the difference between *Brahman* and *Jagat*. Through the screen, the multiplicity of the universe can be seen at the time of origination.

Thus *Ābhāsavāda* in *Pratyabhijñā* and *Advaita Vedānta* explores the nature of reality as the manifestation of consciousness. While *Pratyabhijñā* emphasises Śiva's dynamic, self-revealing play, Advaita Vedānta highlights the illusory nature of duality, grounded in *Brahman*. Both underscore ultimate unity, offering distinct perspectives on the interplay between appearance and absolute reality.

5. References

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