

The Concept of Enlightenment of Self in Isopanishad and Sri Aurobindo : A Comparative Assessment

Bijoy Kumar Das

Deptt. of Philosophy, Darrang College, Tezpur-784001, India

ABSTRACT

The concept of self has a rich tradition of being investigated psychologically from the time of the Vedas and Upanishads. The concept of self is prevalent everywhere both in Psychological thoughts. The Isopanishad, one of the best Upanishads declares that the true knowledge of self is necessary for the attainment of liberation. Isopanishad state that those who deny the self for the attainment of liberation are born again. Such people are ultimately involved in darkness. The self was regarded in the Isopanishad as lying beyond the mind. The idea that the self is transcendent is present in the Isopanishad. At the same time the Isopanishad states the self is imminent. When something is recognized as both transcendent and immanent then its nature turns out to be paradoxical. The nature of the self is described in Isopanishad as in-consistent, Puzzling, Odd, illogical etc. For Aurobindo, the self is Iswara, the Lord. Self is the cause to be born and die, increase and diminish, progress and change. Self enjoys both pleasure and pain, good and bad and also appears to be their victim. The Upanishad four mahavakyas or great sentences was also indicated in the Isopanishad (“Aham brahmasmi”, “Tat tvam asi”, “ayam atma brahma”, “prajnanam brahma.”). No definite description or accounts of the nature of the self has been given by the Isopanishad. One basic point to be emphasized in the Isopanishad is that the inner self is to be identified with the cosmic reality.

Key words : Enlightenment, Isopanishad, Philosophical, Sri Aurobindo

INTRODUCTION

The Philosophical ideas that are presented in the Isopanishad are as follows.... In Isopanishad the Self is said as within all and yet it transcends all. The Self is regarded to be one and it is stated to be the foundations of all existence. The Self is regarded to be the unifying factor of the Universe. It is stated that it is

omnipresent. All these descriptions clearly indicate that the writer of the Isopanishad identifies the Self with the reality itself. The Four and the fifth verse gives us an account of the Paradoxical nature of the Self. Some of the Paradoxes mentioned in the Isopanishad in this regard are – The Self does not move. Yet it is

*Corresponding author's Email: bijoykrdas14@gmail.com

swifter than the mind, The Self remains standing. Others are in motion. Yet the others cannot reach the Self, The Self is declared to be imminent. At the same time it is declared to be transcendent. The fifth verse is translated by R.E. Hume as “It moves. It moves not. It is far and it is near. It is within all these, and it is outside of all these.” By using a Paradoxical language the writer of this verse perhaps wanted to put forward the idea that language is incapable of expressing the nature of the Self (Atman). The Self is given contradictory ascriptions. Thereby the paradoxical nature of the Self is brought out. The Sixth verse also contains a very important Philosophical idea. It states that whoever sees all things in the Self, and the Self in all things does not keep himself separate from anyone. The great monistic ideal of Indian Philosophy is ultimately to be found here. The sixth verse contains thus a profound idea and this profound idea is further elaborated in seventh verse. The seventh verse states that one who has acquired a monistic vision who has realized the basic unity of the individual Self with the cosmic Self goes beyond all delusions and all sufferings.

For Aurobindo, Atman or self represents itself differently in the sevenfold movement of nature according to the dominant principle of the consciousness in the individual being. In the physical consciousness Atman becomes the material being. In the vital or nervous consciousness Atman becomes the vital or dynamic being. In the mental consciousness Atman becomes the mental being. In the supra-intellectual consciousness, dominated by the truth or causal Idea, Atman becomes the ideal being or great soul. In the consciousness proper to the Universal Beatitude, Atman becomes the all-blissful being or all-enjoying and all-

productive soul. In the consciousness proper to the infinite divine self awareness which is also the infinite all-conscious soul that is source and lord of the universe. In the consciousness proper to the state of pure divine existence Atman is *sat purusa*, the pure divine self.

In the four mahavakyas or great sentences indicated beautifully about the self as ‘*Spirit*’, ‘*Consciousness*’, ‘*Ultimate reality*’ etc. In the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad ‘Self’ is regarded as the ultimate reality. In the *Chandogya* Upanishad ‘self’ is regarded as ‘*you*’ who is the ultimate reality. In the *Mandukya* Upanishad ‘self’ is regarded as Brahma. In the *Aitareya* Upanishad ‘self’ is regarded as consciousness. The four mahavakyas is explained briefly in the following.

Aham Brahmasmi :

The first of the basic four is from *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad (1. 4. 10) “*Aham Brahmasmi*”, which means I am the Ultimate reality (The Brahman). In the Vedic literature (*Brihadaranyaka* 1.4.10) it is said I am Brahman as well as I am Spirit. This “I am”, the sense of Self, also exists in the liberated stage of Self-realization. This sense of “I am” refers to ego, but when the sense of “I am” is applied to this false body it is false ego. When the sense of self is applied to reality, refers to real ego. “Brahman means who knows that ‘I am not this body; I am the.... I am the.... I am in Spirit, Conscious, I am Soul, Spirit, Consciousness’, one who knows perfectly well this understanding and the Science also, that ‘I am qualitatively one with the Supreme Lord’, *Aham Brahmasmi*. The Vedic mantra says, *Aham Brahmasmi*. That means ‘I am Brahman. I am not this matter. I am Brahman.’ So one who knows this Science, he is called Brahmana. And this doesn’t matter who

is he and where he is born. That doesn't matter" (Bhagavad Gita 2.48-49, Lectures by Srila Prabhupada, New York, April 1, 1966). *Aham Brahmasmi* when it is stated as I am a spirit soul, not this body. The symptoms of the self-realized persons are given herein. It is said that one should understand that he is Brahman, Spirit and Soul. This Brahman conception of life is also in devotional service, as described in this verse. The pure devotees are transcendently situated on the Brahman platform, and they know everything about transcendental activities.

Tat Tvam Asi :

The second sentence of the basic four is from Chandogya Upanishad VI.8.7 "*Tat Tvam Asi*" which means that [tat] (is what) you [tvam] are [asi]. That refers to the Brahman, while you refer to the Atman, the individual soul or self within every human being. In this sentence the individual self is identified with the cosmic self. The sentence *Tat Tvam Asi* appeared in a conversation between the great sage Uddalaka Aruni and his son Svetaketu. Uddalaka attempted to explain the nature of the ultimate reality to his son Svetaketu. He pointed out that the ultimate reality is none other than the individual self. The content in which the sentence *Tat Tvam Asi* appeared may be briefly stated here. When Svetaketu came back home after completion of his studies, his father, the learned sage Uddalaka came to know that his son had not been taught about the ultimate reality. Uddalaka said that in the beginning pure existence (Sat) was without a second. It wished to become a manifold. Out of it the manifold world emerged. On being asked by son what that pure existence was. Uddalaka replied that pure existence is none other than the individual self. "You are that reality"- that was the reply of Uddalaka. The ultimate reality, Uddalaka

seemed to say, is imminent in everything, including the individual self. The absolute reality constitutes the being of the individual self and therefore Uddalaka identified the individual self with the cosmic self. The universal self is imminent in the individual self of Svetaketu and therefore Uddalaka identified the essence of Svetaketu with the ultimate reality itself.

Ayam Atma Brahma :

The third of the basic four is from Mandukya Upanishad 1.2: "*Ayam Atma Brahma*" which means this self is Brahma. This saying portrays the idea that the individual self is one and the same with the absolute. The concept *Ayam Atma Brahma* is explained with the wave and ocean. The waves and ocean is not considered as separated entity, similarly Atma and Brahman is the same. The aspirant can clearly understand this mahavakyas by taking up the example of the ocean and watching the vastness of the ocean. If a big wave starts to come ashore, and one concentrates on the wave, he can intently notice that the wave get absorbs in the crashing of the surf, and he can feel the salt spray. In that moment, the person is only aware of the vastness of this one wave. The ocean itself is forgotten during that time. The only idea then prevails is that the ocean and the wave is the same and the one. Atman refers to that pure, perfect, eternal spark of consciousness that is the deepest, central core of human being, while Brahman refers to the oneness of the real and unreal universe. It is like saying that atman is a wave, and Brahman is the ocean. The insight of *Ayam Atma Brahma* is that the wave and the ocean are one and the same.

Prajnanam Brahma :

The four of the basic four is from Aitareya Upanishad, III.3.13: "*Prajnanam*

Brahma” which means the ultimate reality is wisdom or consciousness. It is known as the swaroopā vakya, because it indicates the swaroopā or true nature of the ultimate reality. Brahman in this teaching means Truth, or Reality, or God or whatever we may choose to call it. The verse states that “whatever exists here, whether moving or un-moving, all is supported by consciousness. The basic (of the Universe) is consciousness. Consciousness is Brahman.” Brahman is the one consciousness in all manifested forms. As Gold remains gold alone, whether it is molded into coins, jewellery, idols or anything else, the universal consciousness remains the same, no matter in which form it is manifested. Whatever we see or know as this universe, as Gold and our-selves, is nothing but the play of this one consciousness. It is the light of consciousness that illumines everything, both within and without. Rig Veda proclaims ‘*Prajnanam Brahma*’ that is, prajnanam is Brahma; Prajnanam is awareness, consciousness, which is pervading the subtlest texture of the cosmos and is present and active everywhere, at all the places and all the time.

I am that I am :

“*I am that I am*” is a common English translation (King James Bible and others) of the response God used in the Bible when Moses asked for his name (Exodus 3:14). It is one of the most famous verses in the Torah. "Ehyeh asher ehyeh" is generally interpreted to mean "I am that I am", though it more literally translates as "I-shall-be that I-shall-be.". "Ehyeh" is a first-person singular verb, and can be understood as God saying that God is "in the process of being", a reference that could say, based on theological interpretation, that God exists in all times. Holladay defines "asher" as a relative particle, meaning anything from "that" to

"because" to "who." The Roman Catholic Church's interpretation has been summarized in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church". The interpretation is found in numbers 203-213. : In God "there is no variation or shadow due to change." God, who reveals his name as "I AM", reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them. The divine name, "I Am" or "He Is", expresses God's faithfulness: despite the faithlessness of men's sin and the punishment it deserves, he keeps "steadfast love for thousands"... By giving his life to free us from sin, Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that "I AM"." Some religious groups believe that this phrase or at least the "I am" part of the phrase is an actual name of God, or to lesser degree the sole name of God. In the Hindu Advaita Vedanta, the "I am" is explained by teachers such as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj as an abstraction in the mind of the Stateless State, of the Absolute, or the Supreme Reality, called Parabrahman. It is pure awareness, prior to thoughts, free from perceptions, associations and memories.

Indian and Western View's on Self and Sri Aurobindo:

According to Sankaracarya's analysis (whose commentary we have mainly followed in our explanations), Isopanishad lays down two paths for spiritual aspirations- one for the jnanins or those who are the exclusive adherents of the paths of knowledge, and the other for those who have not attained the necessary internal development needed to renounce desires and adopt that exalted way. A jnanins of that type is identical with a Sannyasin. He is absolved from the performance of all sacrificial rites. Repeated study of the Upanishad texts and reflection and

contemplation of the real nature of the Atman are the only activities that engage his attention. And as the first verse and the verses from the fourth to the eight (both included), which describe the nature of the Atman, are meant for him. The rest of the Upanishad has in view all other persons who are bound to the world by the desire to enjoy it. These men, who are attracted by the writings of the world, worship God as a Person with the aim of securing through His grace worldly happiness and spiritual bliss in the form of final emancipation from the round of births and deaths.

In the Visistadvaita Vedanta system, the individual self is regarded by Ramanuja as an attribute or mode of Brahman. It is to be noted here that for Ramanuja the individual self is the body of God. But he didn't thereby mean that the self is bodily in nature. For him 'self' is a spiritual substance. Being a spiritual substance it is absolutely real. The analogy light and luminosity is employed by him to explain the nature of the self. The self is a point of luminosity. The self is beyond creation and destruction. The self is subjected to earthly existence. But this earthly existence and all miseries that follow from it are incapable of affecting the essence of self. The individual self in its essence it is perfect and changeless. For Ramanuja self is the real knower, the real doer and the real enjoyer. Knowledge is regarded by him to be the essence of the soul. The individual soul is viewed as self conscious subject and a self luminous substance. The individual soul is freedom of will. God doesn't interfere in this aspect of the freedom of will. Ramanuja regarded God as the inner controller of the soul.

In the Dvaita Vedanta System, the individual selves are regarded by Madhva as an eternal and atomic. Consciousness and bliss

(ananda) are intrinsic to the selves. But the selves become associated with bodies due to their past karmas or action as a result. The self suffers from misery and pain. Freedom of will has been granted to every self by God. Therefore the self is responsible for its own state of existence.

In the Charvaka Philosophy, soul and body were not differentiated. To them, there is no separate existence of self other than body. Self-consciousness is an emergent property of the body itself. Body is perceptible, not soul. The existence of self after the decay of body is also not permissible. When I say "I am sleeping" then this "I" is nothing else but body, as 'Sleep' is used for symbolizing the rest of the body, not of the soul. Self is, in their tradition, as just body and nothing else. Conscious human body is regarded by the Charvaka as self. Hence all kinds of soul-consciousness are the sheer manifestations of the bodily consciousness. In this respect we can discover their strong similarity with that of the epiphenomenalism of the west where mind and mental parts are considered to be the epiphenomena of the physical components. Only physical parts are apprehended to be the phenomena and the mental components, as the inherent objects within the physical realm, has been known as epiphenomena.

When we look back to the west, we can discover the similar theory regarding self and body in that of William James. According to him, "No psychology.....can question the existence of personal selves". He admitted the possibility of various kinds of self, e.g. the material self, social self and the spiritual self. If we concentrate only towards his theory of material self, then we can certainly deduce that self=body. The body is the innermost part of the

material self in each of us; and the body as a whole seems more intimately ours than the rest. Without body no one can exist. Self has to be manifested within the bodily realm of an individual. Hence at least in the case of material self, William James too accepted the doctrine of equality between self and body. In our common sense point of view, we can immediately remove this dichotomy by calling that self is conscious and body is un-conscious, hence body should never stand for self. However, Sri Aurobindo's position is certainly much different from that. It is true that soul is supremely conscious, but body even is not at all un-conscious in its inherent nature. He explained his position in two ways as following-

First, by showing the presence of bodily consciousness and secondly, by rejecting the idea that matter must be un-conscious in nature. Let us start with the first standpoint. When our fingers are cut, then the mind can also feel the pain. The reason of it, as conceived by him, is that body has its own consciousness though in the dormant level. For that reason, body can influence the mind (as shown in the above example) and also body can do my things according to its own will, e.g. picking up a spoon or knife even when we are not conscious of it. By these two examples we can prove the existence of consciousness in matter. According to Sri Aurobindo, Consciousness is a fundamental thing which in the process of involution for fulfilling the Divine purpose of God (this Divine purpose is due to Sachchidananda's cosmic manifestation) takes the form of apparently un-conscious matter. So matter, in his theory, is nothing but a dormant form of Divine consciousness. From his *Life Divine* we ultimately derive this truth. Actually due to our ignorance we misunderstood the true nature of matter as

inconscious. For describing matter, Sri Aurobindo uses the term "sleep of consciousness" unless "suspension of consciousness" which is sufficient enough to prove the existence of consciousness even in the material level.

According to Rene Descartes, "I think, therefore I am" this cogito ergo sum thesis indicates towards drawing a conclusion such that self= mind. Here the word, 'I' stands for "Self". But this self can never be able to think, but mind. Thinking thus indicates towards the mind. Hence 'I think' this utterance could be true if and only if we accept that self is mind. In Kantian doctrine, we can't understand soul without understanding the mind. Consciousness is a unique feature of mind. Hence, without mental consciousness there is no such thing as self-consciousness. We can't experience self-consciousness, but mental consciousness. For him, self-consciousness simply implies having experience and recognizing that as one's own (mental consciousness). So, no difference between self and mind could be drawn in Kant's thesis.

However, in the opinion of David Hume, we find out that soul in nothing but just the Bundle of mental thoughts. We can't experience any such thing like soul, but only our mental states. We can identify the experience of our childhood due to the existence of such mental states remaining intact till now. In his book, "Treatise Concerning Human Nature" he clearly argued that there is no such thing as self even if we have strong belief in its favor. What we can experience is the continuous flow of perception that replaces one another in rapid succession. His thesis is known as the Bundle theory of Mind. This can also be claimed as the No-Self theory of Hume. When we consult the

Indian tradition, then we can discover a somewhat a similar theory with that of the Bundle theory of Hume is the Buddhist theory of Anatma-vada. According to them, there is no such thing as the eternal soul. The soul we see is just a mental flux and comprises of every little bit of mental experiences. Self is nothing but a succession of several mental states; we can't experience soul, but only that of these mental states. Hence soul stands to them nothing but a mental phenomenon.

From the point of view of Sri Aurobindo, all consciousness is not mental, soul consciousness remains in the highest position; and secondly, soul is not similar to mind. In the first interpretation, he shows us that consciousness is not at all mental. In the hierarchy of consciousness-level, mental consciousness is actually that type of consciousness which exists within the range of human knowledge.

We can discover a somewhat related theory in that Sartre. According to him, the consciousnesses can conceive of other objects but it can't conceive of other consciousness. Sartre in his book, "Transcendence of the Ego" mentioned that the consciousness can conceive of other egos, be it my ego, or be it the ego of another person.

But in Sri Aurobindo's notion self is not at all replaceable by ego. Ego is the cause of generating ahankara in every living creature. It is mainly responsible for every kind of authoritative feelings that gave birth of the false notion that only I am that person on the earth that can do it.

CONCLUSION

Now we can draw our conclusion on the basis of our above discussion. The Concept of Self is the Psychological thoughts. No one

can explain the nature of Self without Psychological thoughts. Where from this thoughts come, is it from our body or mind or other source? This was the biggest question in Isopanishad and that's why, it is explained as the true knowledge for the attainment of liberation. For Aurobindo, we born, grow and die at last. No one can get rid of it. Self is the cause for that. Self enjoys both pain and pleasure. Though, it is the natural process of nature but, for Aurobindo, the nature is within the Self. For Aurobindo, Self is Iswara. The uniqueness of Isopanishad and of Sri Aurobindo concept of self is truly amazing. None before Isopanishad and perhaps even after Sri Aurobindo, either of the Indian tradition or of the Western one, ever dare to think of self as inner being of the individual. The Isopanishad is known as the Upanishad that contains knowledge on bringing one closer to the Isa, supreme personality of Godhead (Isa+ Upanishad= Isopanishad), Krishna. The Isopanishad contains very profound scientific truths and the ultimate conclusion of the worship of the supreme personality of Godhead. On the other hand, no one other than Sri Aurobindo conceives self as the "inner-most being" and gives such a vivid description of its workings. The inmost being or psychic being, according to him, is the mere manifestation of the Brahman. In this way he beautifully draws a correlation of jivatman or psychic being with that of paramatman or God. Standing far beyond the reach of the ordinary mental consciousness of man, the psychic being or self is actually the individual expression of divinity hidden within each human being. And this is the true essence of his theory concerning human being.

REFERENCES

- The Isavasyopanishad XVI.
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1. 4. 10)

- Chandogya Upanishad VI.8.7
Aitareya Upanishad, III.3.13
- Blackburn, Simon (1994), "Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy", Oxford University Press, YMCA, Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi.
- Dutta, D.M.(1950), "The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy", Calcutta University Press, Vivekananda Road, Calcutta 6.
- Ghosh, Aurobindo (2003), "Isha Upanishad" Vol. 17, the complete works of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.
- Ghosh, Aurobindo (2005), "The Life Divine", Vol. 21 and 22, The complete works of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.
- Ghosh, Aurobindo (1999), "The Synthesis of Yoga", Vol. 23 and 24, the complete works of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.
- Ghosh, Aurobindo (1998), "The Secret of the Veda", Vol. 15, the complete works of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.
- Ghosh, Aurobindo (1997), "Essay on the Gita", Vol.19, The complete works of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.
- Mahadeven, T.M.P. & Saroja, G.V. (1981), "Contemporary Indian Philosophy", Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., L-10, Green Park Extension, New Delhi.
- Radhakrishnan, Dr. Sarvepalli (1948), "The Bhagavad Gita; with an introductory Essay, Sanskrit text, English translation and notes".
- Sinha, S.C. (1991), "Dictionary of Philosophy", Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- Sharma, C.D. (2003), "A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy", Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi.
- Thilly, Frank (1999), "A History of Philosophy", Central Publishing House, Allahabad.
- Vatsyayan, Dr., "Philosophy of Religion", S.J. Publications, Meerut.

Websites :

- <http://www.answer.com/topic/ghoshaurobindo>
<http://www.aurobindo'sviewofself>
<http://www.Isopanisadconceptofself>
<http://www.brihadaranyakaupanisadviewofself>
<http://www.mandukyaupanisadviewofself>
<http://chandogyaupanisadviewofself>
<http://aitareyaupanisadviewofself>
<http://www.westerviewofself>